Twilight on the Roads
The Wagner Drives of David Hockney

by

Arthur B. Kolat

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
2016

Advisor: James Elkins
E.C. Chadbourne Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism

First Reader: Seth Kim-Cohen
Assistant Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism

Second Reader: Lawrence Weschler
Independent Writer

Abstract

In this thesis, I investigate the practice of driving with music that takes place in the Wagner Drives by David Hockney. The Wagner Drives are choreographed car trips at sunset in the mountains of Southern California set to the music of Richard Wagner. Hockney developed these drives in the Santa Monica Mountains near Malibu, California in the early 1990s. This thesis contextualizes the drives within the broader scope of Hockney's artistic endeavors: his paintings, photocollages, operatic stage designs, and recent Yorkshire landscape work. It also analyzes the juxtapositions of music and landscape that the Wagner Drives produce, focusing on *Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung* from Wagner's epic *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and several scenes from his last opera *Parsifal*. Evaluating the place of the Wagner Drives in art history, I compare them to the Gesamtkunstwerk and Romanticism, Proust and Duchamp, the Fluxus events of George Brecht, Tony Smith's nighttime ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike, and the constructed situations of performance artist Tino Sehgal. I see the Wagner Drives' valence as performance art as bound up with their relationship to their documentation and reperformance. To that end I examine my own responses to the Wagner Drives via the exhibition *Stunt Road,* in which I presented my documentation and reperformance efforts. This thesis is the first in depth analysis of the Wagner Drives; I ultimately argue that they are an innovative and intriguing example of late twentieth-century experimental art.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I owe my sincerest thanks for their support throughout the course of this project. Chief among them is Jim Elkins, my advisor, who has been discussing the Wagner Drives with me for years. It was his initial encouragement of my interest in an obscure practice that bolstered my instinct and set this project in motion. I hope the following pages due at least partial justice to the wisdom of his counsel.

The art history faulty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago have also been extremely generous with me. Special thanks are due to Seth Kim-Cohen, whose feedback on this project has been invaluable. My thanks as well to David Raskin, Michael Golec, Mechtild Widrich, and Margaret MacNamidhe for suggesting different vantages from which to consider the Wagner Drives. SAIC has enabled me to engage productively with a very contemporary moment and for that I am extremely grateful.

A copy of this manuscript was circulated to Brian Leahy and Alison Reilly whose comments have greatly clarified both my thinking and writing. My extended conversations with them have helped me parse the issues at stake, and the result of their collaboration has resulted in stronger, more persuasive argumentation. As passengers on my Wagner Drives, their impressions were also crucial during a period of experimentation.

I wish to thank every one of the passengers on the Wagner Drives that I performed: Roberto Ignacio Diaz, Jim Stoecker, Mike Love, Zuzana Fedorkova, and Garrick Trapp. Their reactions to the specificity of the experience opened up new

avenues of thought and made my reperformances into very special and memorable events.

My partner in the Wagner Drive reperformances was Ange Wong. Our time in the Santa Monica Mountains together with CDs and a book of maps was an indispensible and extraordinarily fun part of my research. Additionally, Ange's ambitious pieces in our exhibition, *Stunt Road,* were a unique and insightful response to an ongoing conversation about the Wagner Drives.

This project could not have been completed without the help of Ren Weschler, who shared his recollections with me and put me in touch with David Hockney. Ren is a true gem whose generosity went many extras steps toward helping me access information that I could not have accessed without his help. Likewise, I must thank David Hockney's terrific team: Jonathan Mills, Jonathan Wilkinson, Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, and Gregory Evans, who have all been outstanding in their support of my project. A special thanks goes to Bing McGilvray who helped me locate a home movie of an early Wagner Drive.

The type of support that my mother has given me throughout this process has gone beyond the normal bounds of encouragement. She has thoroughly indulged my interests and been my longest and most unwavering confidante in these efforts. On my thirtieth birthday we drove through Hockney's Yorkshire together, the beginning of a winding road that has led me to the current study.

Finally, I wish to thank David Hockney for his generosity in taking me on a drive and speaking with me extensively about his art. Looking through his eyes is a unique experience and I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to do so.

Table of Contents

Abstract..i

Acknowledgements..ii

Introduction..1

Chapter 1: Driving as a Theme in Hockney's Life and Work....................................4

Chapter 2: Experiencing the Wagner Drives....................................20
    The Playlists and the Types of Superimposition....................................30
    The Malibu Canyon Road Drive....................................32
    Hockney's Intentions....................................41

Chapter 3: Do The Wagner Drives Matter as a Moment in Modernism/Postmodernism?....................................45
    The Gesamtkunstwerk, the Leitmotif, and the Interrelation of the Arts...............46
    Romanticism....................................51
    Modernism: Motoring Days....................................57
    The Indistinguishability of Art and Life....................................59
    Precedents in Postmodernist Ephemeral Art....................................64
    Concerns of Constructed Situations in Contemporary Art....................................73
    The Wagner Drives' Place in Art History....................................77

Chapter 4: Responding to the Wagner Drives: Documentation, Study, and Reperformance....................................79
    Stunt Road: An Exhibition After Hockney....................................82
    An Imaginary Wagner Drive....................................91

Figures..102

In-Text Illustration Credits 124

Bibliography..125

Introduction

Many people delight in the experience of playing music while driving. Sometimes, if the conditions are right, it can even produce profound feelings. The Wagner Drives of David Hockney are one configuration that taps this potential by pairing a drive through the mountains of Southern California with the operatic music of Richard Wagner. There are many other possible configurations, of course. It would be an intriguing project to survey the various and complex ways that people have coordinated and felt the specific coincidences of music and car travel.

The present study focuses on the Wagner Drives as a notable effort in this area due to the deliberateness of their choreography and the complexity of their juxtapositions. They are also the work of a famous artist whose long career has produced paintings, drawings, prints, photos, stage designs, and much more. But in what sense are the Wagner Drives a work of art at all? What experience do they create? How do they fit into to Hockney's larger set of concerns? And how might they be interpreted by art history?

The question of whether or not the Wagner Drives are art is a tricky one. Throughout much of this thesis, I have treated them as an artwork, considering the relationships that they present and analyzing their character. I do not wish, however, to take their status as art for granted. Indeed, it is possible that they began in 1990 as something other than art and have only over the years come to be increasingly framed as art by a variety of factors, the present study included.

My research has led me to evaluate the Wagner Drives in four main ways, which form the four chapters of this thesis. First, in Chapter 1, I identify the themes in

Hockney's life and work that I see as providing valuable context for understanding the Wagner Drives, namely driving and opera. Driving has been a significant artistic part of Hockney's life and there are pictures from across the span of his career that depict the world as experienced from an automobile. Often, these pictures also evidence an appreciation for the natural world. Likewise, Hockney's role as an operatic stage designer from the 1970s to the 1990s is intimately connected to the expanded operatic staging that the Wagner Drives enact. As a stage designer, Hockney began to respond imaginatively to music and the Wagner Drives come logically out of this trajectory as well.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to understanding the experience that the Wagner Drives create. I start the chapter by reporting the details of the three different Wagner Drives, the one that I went on with Hockney and the two that I performed independently. Through an analysis of the music and an account of the view from the car, I endeavor to puzzle out how the musical and visual components might meaningfully fit together. This is my critical reading of being on a Wagner Drive. I conclude the chapter with some thoughts on how Hockney views the drives and make suggestions about what I believe his aims and expectations were.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the place of the Wagner Drives in the history of art and whether or not they matter as a moment in the histories of modernism and postmodernism. My answer is, of course, yes, to a certain extent they do matter. I argue in Chapter 3 that the Wagner Drives resonate with concerns from the histories of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century art and ultimately resist easy classification. I conclude that the drives are an innovative and experimental practice that engages a constellation of issues from different art historical moments without fitting comfortably within any existing genealogy.

Chapter 4 chronicles my role in documenting the Wagner Drives and my several artistic responses to them. I analyze the drives' valence as performance art through their relationship to their documentation as well as to my own reperformances of them. The chapter examines an exhibition I held at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago of work based on the Wagner Drives, such as a video piece of my Malibu Canyon Road Drive reperformance and a photo installation made in collaboration with the photographer Ange Wong. The final response to the Wagner Drives in this chapter is a written account of a Wagner Drive that I imagined going on before I had the opportunity to actually do so. This was my first attempt to understand the Wagner Drives and an experiment in studying an ephemeral work whose documentary traces are fragmentary at best.

By focusing on the Wagner Drives, this thesis addresses a gap not only in the critical literature on Hockney but also in the treatment of the drives themselves. They are among Hockney's least-known works and perhaps also among his least-knowable. My aim in the following pages will be to shed light on the Wagner Drives, scrutinize them, and consider the open questions that they pose.

Chapter 1

Driving as a Theme in Hockney's Life and Work

Throughout his career, David Hockney has engaged with the visible world from the driver's seat of a car. The Wagner Drives*,* from the early 1990s, are but one manifestation—unusual though it is—of this persistent interest in driving. Depictions of cars, roads, and the motion of driving can be found across the span of Hockney's work from his paintings and prints to his photographs and video works. Moreover, the experience of looking while driving is reflected in his very philosophy of picture-making. Spatially, this philosophy is principally aimed at eliminating the void between viewer and pictorial space, creating a bigger picture. Temporally, it strives to unfreeze the single point of Western perspective by incorporating a dimension of time into the picture. While neither of these concerns follows exclusively from the experience of car travel, driving nonetheless proves to be a useful interpretive lens through which to read many of Hockney's works. Both this interest in driving and his work as an operatic stage designer form contexts from which the Wagner Drives emerge.

The earliest major driving picture in Hockney's body of work comes from 1962, the year he graduated from London's Royal College of Art (RCA), before he knew how to drive. The painting *Flight into Italy – Swiss Landscape* (figure 1) was the product of his first trip to continental Europe during the holiday break before his final term at college. In it, he appears, wearing red, uncomfortably folded into the windowless back compartment of a van as it drives through Switzerland, en route from Paris to Bern.

Hockney writes, "I was especially looking forward to the Alps and I thought…here's a real subject to make a picture of: mountain landscape in the Alps…I thought the misty Alps in winter would be a great thrill."[1] Through the long and uncomfortable car trip, however, he saw nothing of the actual landscape from his vantage in the back seat. Deciding he could nevertheless carry out the painting by inventing the mountain landscape, he consulted a geography textbook, whose imagery he then translated into an undulating band of colored ribbons, a nod, perhaps, to the modernist abstraction of the time. In the distance, behind the dip of a valley, he inserted a realistic alpine peak that he had copied directly from a picture postcard. *Flight into Italy* thus foreshadows his interest in admiring landscape from a moving car precisely through its depiction of an ironically aborted attempt to do so. The result is a stylistically mixed representation of what was not seen. In the substitution of found imagery, the flat and static qualities of the landscape, and the tense look on Hockney's face, *Flight into Italy* serves as an apt foil for and precursor of the thrills of space and movement that would come to preoccupy him in later decades.

Hockney's love of driving blossomed in Los Angeles, where, upon his first visit in early 1964, he drove a car for the first time, got his first driver's license, and bought his first car. Hockney recounts that upon first learning to drive he was "thrilled but frightened…I thought, I'll have to practice; and I just drove anywhere. I got on a freeway the second day and I daren't move off any of the lanes and I went all the way to San Bernardino on the freeway, sixty miles inland. I thought, I'll turn round here, if I can find where you get off. Then there's a sign: Las Vegas 200 miles. And I thought, wonderful, I'll practice in the desert, and I drove all the way to Las Vegas, and drove back at night."[2] As immediately as he gained confidence behind the wheel, he began to explore the vast expanses of the United States by car. Later in 1964 he drove from Los Angeles to Iowa City to take up a summer teaching post, traveling through New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois, before eventually looping back to Iowa. It was the first of many car trips into and across the interior of the United States.

---

[1] *David Hockney by David Hockney,* ed., Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 87.

Something of the relish with which Hockney drove can be glimpsed in the diaries of Christopher Isherwood, an English writer and California transplant with whom Hockney became close after arriving in Los Angeles. Isherwood refers to car trips with Hockney, both in the United States and Europe, as "whiz tours." In a diary entry from March 1970, in the south of France, Isherwood writes,

> David, with magnificent determination, drove us all the way to Le Nid du Duc [the Provençal residence of British filmmaker Tony Richardson], through fog and up into the mountains…He actually drives very well but very fast and the constant overtaking of cars on the narrow three-lane roads was a great strain on my nerves. What *is* the sense of rushing like this, just for the sake of making it to Carcassonne? What a joyless kind of pleasure, tearing past the umbrella pines, the vines, the hilltop towns, the red Cézanne landscape, the narrow streets and the plane trees. Yet David himself remains lovable, so good-humored…so full of fun and enthusiasm.[3]

Isherwood's stress notwithstanding, the picture of Hockney is one of confident explorer, brimming with joie de vivre, navigating the mountain roads and country lanes. Despite the tone of complaint, Isherwood's list of visual pleasures emblematizes the thrill of the drive. His only real annoyance is that Hockney did not linger in the landscape as long as he—Isherwood—would have liked. The timing of drives—how fast to go, how long to linger—is a balancing act that recurs in the Wagner Drives. I explore the subject of timing further in Chapter 2.

---

[2] Ibid., 97.

[3] Christopher Isherwood, *Liberation: Diaries, Volume Three: 1970-1983* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 31.

The Wagner Drives spring not only from Hockney's interest in driving, but also from his interest in opera. In the 1970s, he veered away, as it were, from the imagery of Los Angeles and driving, as his career as an operatic set designer began. Though he would not design the sets for his only Wagnerian opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, until 1986-1987, his interest in Richard Wagner was evident much earlier on. In 1972, for example, Hockney selected two pieces of music by Wagner—"Verachtet mir die Meister nicht" from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and the "Liebestod" from *Tristan und Isolde*—out of the eight total that he was allotted on the BBC radio interview program *Desert Island Discs*. Later, in both 1974 and 1978, he made the pilgrimage to the town of Bayreuth, Germany, to experience Wagner's most epic work, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in the theater that Wagner had designed expressly and exclusively for the performance of his music dramas. Hockney writes of his experience in Bayreuth, "I was staying with two friends at an inn in the centre of Bayreuth. When you are there you know you have gone to have a unique experience: this one work of art which takes a week. You never forget why you're there…Everywhere you looked there were pictures of Wagner…I spent the days reading the librettos. I prepared myself each day, as I think most people do. It takes you a week and it is this one massive work."[4]

Over the course of seventeen years, from Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* in 1975 to Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in 1992, Hockney designed the stage sets for a total of nine operas and two ballets. This aspect of his work brought with it its own set of concerns about time, motion, music, narrative, and lighting, which sensitized him to these issues in other areas of his work. Reflecting on the moment after the 1975 premiere of *The Rake's Progress*, Hockney writes, "Suddenly, I realized I'd found a way to move into another area. In a sense I'd broken my previous attitudes about space and naturalism, which had been bogging me down. I'd found areas to step into which were fascinating: the space of the theatre."[5] The space of the theater demanded attention to the way a three-dimensional picture could fluctuate in space and unfold over time in service of narrative ends. The manifestations of these theatrical disruptions of space and naturalism can be seen in much of Hockney's subsequent career, one of whose major themes has been the tension between naturalistic depiction and spatial experimentation. From this point of view, the Wagner Drives represent an extreme case of experimentation with theater, space, and naturalism. In the drives, Wagner's mythical worlds mingle with naturalism's model—nature—in an expanded theatrical space that the viewer moves through.

---

[4] David Hockney, *That's the way I see it,* ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 44.

In the late seventies Hockney became more and more immersed in the opera. In 1978, after his production of Mozart's *Magic Flute* at the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, he saw his second production of Wagner's *Ring* at Bayreuth, this time in the celebrated centenary production conducted by Pierre Boulez and staged by Patrice Chéreau. That same summer Hockney moved back to California and again took up Los Angeles as a theme in his work with a picture called *Canyon Painting* (1978).

In 1980 Hockney's operatic work coincided chronologically with his work on two paintings of Southern California roads. In the midst of rehearsing a triple bill of French stage works for the Metropolitan Opera, he painted both *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio* (figure 2) and *Nichols Canyon* (figure 3).[6] In the summer of that year he began experimenting in his studio with models of the stage sets and a lighting machine specially built to light the models. He could control the lights simply by pressing buttons. Hockney recalls, "I would play the music and match the lighting to the music; that was the first time I fully realized I must take an interest in the lighting as well, especially since I was using very strong colours. I then started playing versions of the opera a bit differently, from beginning to end because the operas were short – Ravel's [*L'enfant et les sortilèges*] is only forty-five minutes, so I could play it three or four times a night and practice the lighting with it."[7]

---

[5] Ibid., 28.

[6] The so-called French Triple Bill consisted of *Parade* by Satie, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* by Poulenc, and *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* by Ravel.

Practicing the lighting implies that there is a degree of coordination or matching that the lights, stage sets, and music can achieve together. Much of the success or failure of a particular operatic production rests on the ability of its collaborative elements to fit together in illuminating, clever, or novel ways. Hockney's collaboration with the opera director John Cox for their 1975 production of *The Rake's Progress* provides an early example of the various levels of conceptual matching with which Hockney was beginning to experiment. Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* is a mid-twentieth-century opera inspired by Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*, a series of eight paintings—and subsequent prints—from the early eighteenth century. For his stage designs Hockney decided to use a stylized crosshatching pattern reminiscent of Hogarth's engravings, thus matching the visual inspiration for the production to the narrative inspiration for the opera. Furthermore, Hockney's twentieth-century utilization of an eighteenth-century technique "coincided exactly with the sources of Stravinsky own musical inspiration."[8] Mozart, for example, had been one such influence on Stravinsky's neoclassical compositions.

---

[7] Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 66.

[8] John Cox and Martin Friedman, "Hockney at Glyndebourne," in *Hockney Paints the Stage,* by Martin Friedman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 78.

In addition to the resonances in Hockney's *Rake* between the visual and musical styles, and their resonance in turn with the epoch of Hogarth, Cox tasked Hockney with matching "the action, content and mood of each scene…detail for detail, from the whole corpus of Hogarth's work."[9] This created a specificity of matching, in which the sets and costumes strove to match the story's content. Hockney picked out specific details from Hogarth's work that were apposite to the opera's updated tale. One example of this was the tomb in the graveyard scene where Tom Rakewell and Nick Shadow play cards. According to Cox, the scene was inspired by *The Idle 'Prentice at Play in the Church Yard, During Divine Service* from Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* series. Five years later, with the French Triple Bill at the beginning of the eighties, Hockney increasingly saw the potential of matching the lighting to the music and sets, an interest that his custom-built lighting machine had enabled him to practice and sharpen. The various ways in which conceits, moods, lighting effects, and specific details of music and scenery might be said to match are at the heart of the Wagner Drives as well. A deeper exploration of the types of matching in the Wagner Drives is taken up in Chapter 2.

While Hockney's operatic efforts in 1980 were directed towards the French Triple Bill in New York, his paintings *Mulholland Drive* and *Nichols Canyon* expressed the energy of driving in Los Angeles. These two paintings stand in contrast to the previous year's *Santa Monica Blvd.* (1979), which had been an attempt to portray the street life along a stretch of the boulevard as seen from a slow-moving car. Hockney ultimately found *Santa Monica Blvd.*'s static quality dissatisfying and unworkable. *Mulholland Drive* and *Nichols Canyon,* on the other hand, were pictures that he felt more closely captured the experience of driving in the winding hills of Southern California. In *Nichols Canyon*, for instance, the viewer sees a series of houses dotting the canyon road, around which the road's curves swing back and forth. The impression is one of conveyance into the canyon along a winding road whose scenery is shifting constantly. Rounding the bend of Nicholas Canyon Road the first house seems to fade into the rear view mirror as the imaginary car passes the second house on its left. In his reading of *Mulholland Drive,* Hockney likewise connects the painting to the act of driving. He writes, "your eye moves around the painting at about the same speed as a car drives along the road."[10]

---

[9] John Cox and Martin Friedman, "Hockney at Glyndebourne," in *Hockney Paints the Stage,* by Martin Friedman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 78.

In the 1980s, Hockney became increasingly preoccupied with representing the time, and therefore also the movement, involved in deep looking. Through the medium of photocollage, he brought together the instants captured by each individual photograph into images that sometimes contained hundreds of these instants, inviting the viewer into a longer engagement in front of the composite picture. Two photocollages from a 1982 car trip to Utah show Hockney applying this technique to the drive itself. In *R.V. Zion Canyon Utah October 1982* (figure 4) Hockney depicts a two-lane road running through Zion Canyon National Park, a parked van pulling an R.V. trailer on the far side of the road, and a geologically striated mountain into or around which the road appears to lead. Time and movement are inscribed in the very fabric of the image in the sense that each individual photo acts as a record of where Hockney has looked, the area over which his gaze has moved during the time he took to study the landscape. Looking at the column of five photos in the lower central part of the work, the viewer sees the gleaming, gravely road at close range. It is as if the viewer has pulled the car over, stepped out, and looked down at the road. Moving up to the left edge the picture, the viewer sees two overlapping photos of the road's shoulder before the road itself vanishes into the looming mountain. The ability for one's eyes to wander through each individual photograph places the viewer in a kind of virtual space, one in which she can turn her head left to right along the road and up and down in front of the mountain, as far as the roughly fifty individual cells of visual information allow.

---

[10] Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 67.

Hockney experimented extensively with how to allow this type of motion-rich looking in his photocollages: up and down the lengths of bridges and telephone poles; around the circle of faces at dining tables and in living rooms. In Hockney's view, exploring these discrete cells and synthesizing them into a coherent whole mimics the way people visually apprehend and process the real, three-dimensional world. Contained within *R.V. Zion Canyon* are traces of time, which layered together, form a record of various past moments, like the depicted mountain that keeps a geological record in its strata.

In *Steering Wheel October 1982* (figure 5), the subject of the picture is both the driver's own motion of vision from behind the steering wheel of the car, as well as the motion of road travel itself. The field of vision available to the viewer starts in Hockney's lap at the bottom of the picture and moves up through the Mercedes Benz steering wheel, instrument panel, road, horizon, and sky. To the left of the picture, three photos describe the side-view mirror, through which a car is glimpsed travelling the opposite direction, receding into the distance. This is quite probably the very same car seen advancing toward Hockney's Mercedes in the photograph third from the right in the top row. This creates a before-and-after effect within the Gestalt of the image, which in turn implies the rush of movement as the oncoming car speeds by, emerging from one horizon and disappearing into another. The ability of a photocollage to contain individual photos of before and after an event opens up the possibility of depicting a narrative within the composite image. In the case of *Steering Wheel*, the narrative is a single event: a car drove by Hockney's parked Mercedes going in the opposite direction. However, in many of Hockney's photocollages the narrative construction is more complex than the depiction of a single event.[11]

In 1986, Hockney's intense period of photocollage work culminated with a picture of a road in *Pearblossom Hwy.* (figure 6)*,* after which he started work designing the sets for Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde,* commissioned by the Los Angeles Music Center Opera. *Pearblossom Hwy.*, originally intended as an illustration for a story about Humbert Humbert driving the deserts of the American Southwest in search of Lolita, is a composite picture made up of an estimated eight hundred individual photographs. The road in the picture runs straight up the center of the collage, crossing Pearblossom Highway in the middle distance and vanishing far away at the foot of the mountains on the horizon. To the right, four street signs line the road, descending in size as they move away from the viewer. On either side, flat fields of Joshua trees extend out for miles.

In its composition, *Pearblossom Hwy*. has the hallmarks of a picture rendered in traditional single point perspective. In reality, however, each single photograph has its own vanishing point, and the resulting image includes hundreds of perspectives. The single photograph that shows the face of the stop sign, for example, reveals how Hockney's collage technique differentiates itself fundamentally from a picture done in perspective. The stop sign occupies almost the entire area of its individual photograph. Photographed from close range, it shows the stop sign from the viewpoint of someone standing on a ladder directly in front of it. The supposed overall perspective of the composite picture is therefore imaginary, drawn, as it were, out of many single perspectives. Hockney describes *Pearblossom Hwy*. as his "most painterly" photocollage, adding that he saw it "as a panoramic assault on Renaissance one-point perspective."[12] *Pearblossom Hwy*.'s landscape is therefore both real and imaginary, a real desert intersection in Southern California that has been cast in a fictitious story about driving. The otherworldly quality of real landscapes as seen from the car connects *Pearblossom Hwy.* to one of the central devices of the Wagner Drives.

---

[11] A good example of a the narrative potential of a Hockney photocollage is Lawrence Weschler's reading of Hockney's *The Scrabble Game* (1983). "We watch as Mrs. Hockney concentrates and then scores a handsome windfall by centering VEX over a double-word square—a neat 26 points. The board presently comes round to Ann, affording her access to a triple-word corner slot—she ponders, and ponders (five separate faces) and finally ventures the truly pathetic NET (three lower scoring letter could not have been found). David Graves keeping score, looks over her shoulder, considers her predicament, and then breaks into a grin at her solution: three times one times three—nine points. A cat on the side of the table looks up, rummages around, and falls back to sleep." Lawrence Weschler, "True to Life," in *Cameraworks,* by David Hockney and Lawrence Weschler (New York: Knopf, 1984), 28.

The experience of making *Pearblossom Hwy*. affected Hockney's designs for *Tristan*. Hockney writes, "I started using my ideas about perspective, which I had developed in photography, from the complexity of *Pearblossom Hwy.*, which although it has actually got hundreds of perspectives, looks as though it's got a normal one as well. I realized one could maybe do this in space. I couldn't make hundreds of perspectives in the sets, on the stage, but I could make quite a few that still looked as if they were one. The effect, I thought, would be to pull the viewer closer into it." [13] At the same time that Hockney was developing his ideas about the shape of the stage sets, he was also rehearsing again with his model lighting system.

> I never made drawings, but kept cutting out shapes, placing them in space, then lighting it, all the while playing the music and realizing what marvellously

---

[12] Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 112.
[13] Ibid., 172.

> different effects you could get from the use of the sails, how you could make it feel as though the ship were on an open sea, how you could suddenly make it feel as if you were close up on the deck. The sails were painted with a very bold texture, which if you lit it in a certain way looked as though your face were right next to the mast. Devices like this pulled you into the scene, called the audience into the space of the drama (figure 8).[14]

Both Hockney's use of multiple perspectives, whether in photocollages or in opera sets, and his use of dynamic stage lighting functioned to pull the viewer into the drama. These concerns—the sudden change inherent to drama, the dramatic effects of lighting, the ability to view the same scene from multiple vantage points, the sympathetic involvement of the spectator—would be developed and played out to their logical extremes in the Wagner Drives, which came a few years after the opening of *Tristan* in Los Angeles.

Around the time of *Tristan*, Hockney made a film in which he explored the possibilities of movement through landscape that he saw in Chinese hand scroll painting. The film, *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China*, is a forty-five minute guided tour by Hockney through a scroll by Wang Hui and his assistants called *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, (scroll seven).* In the film Hockney extols the virtues of moving through space as one's eyes wander down alleyways and over bridges, jump over garden walls and peek into shop windows. For Hockney, because the scroll was a picture without edges and without a European vanishing point, he felt the freedom to explore the city and landscape at length, virtually walking around the southern provinces. He contrasted this experience with the experience of being in a room at the Metropolitan Museum that contained a 360-degree panorama of Versailles. In the panorama he had had to stand rigidly in the middle of the room and rotate around. "To make it work, I had to be a tiny immobile point. In short, my body seemed to have been taken away, whereas in the Chinese scroll I still had my body. I was wandering through it, which was much more real to me. That's what excited me."[15] In the Wang Hui scroll, not only is there a corporeal thrill of movement because the temporal element of the picture enables it, but there is also a narrative, that of the Emperor visiting his territories. As Hockney's title for the film suggests, the viewer, in the very act of journeying along with the Emperor, participates in constructing the narrative.

---

[14] Ibid., 172-173.

When Hockney started spending more of his time in Malibu, California in 1988, his lifelong interests in driving, breaking the frame of Western perspective, narrative art, opera, music, lighting, the thrill of a body in space, and reverence for nature coalesced in the choreographed performance of the Wagner Drives. This work is one of Hockney's least object-based and the artifacts that document it are necessarily fragmentary. The first durable material that resulted from the Wagner Drives is a suite of paintings that Hockney exhibited at the Andre Emmerich Gallery in New York City from December 1990 to January 1991 under the simple title *Things Recent* (figures 10-15).

The paintings show a series of views of the Santa Monica Mountains that Hockney saw during the Wagner Drives, which he timed to coincide with the sunset. The pictures, accordingly, include mountains, hills, and thrusting rocks that are cloaked in the deep shadows of late afternoon. In contrast to a drive, the mountain paintings have a still quality about them, as if to underscore the motionlessness of the mountains themselves. Also included in the *Things Recent* catalogue is a photograph that Hockney took in 1990 from a cruise ship in Alaska. The photo, *Spectators in Alaska* (figure 16), shows seven passengers on the prow of the ship who are admiring the massive glacier before them. Writing about the photograph, Hockney personifies the table umbrellas on the deck of the ship. "The umbrellas seemed to me like 19th-century ladies in crinolines. In fact, the whole scene had a 19th-century feel to it—it reminded me of one of those pictures of tourists reverently viewing Nature."[16] The Wagner Drives, from the same year as *Spectators*, also combine a nineteenth-century atmosphere with a reverent viewing of nature.

---

[15] Ibid., 128.

Hockney's fascination with natural landscapes has continued into the late nineties and first decades of the current century with a body of work dedicated to the East Yorkshire countryside in England. Although one major theme of this work is the natural effects of the changing seasons, I argue that an important sub-theme is the perception of nature while driving. In *The Road to York through Sledmere* (figure 17), Hockney paints the small town Sledmere as seen from the perspective of a car traveling through it. As Lawrence Weschler notes, *The Road to York* captures "what it's like to drive through a place, as opposed to what it is to be frozen in place."[17] Indeed, this painting was the result of a drive that Hockney made with regularity across the wide-open spaces of East Yorkshire. In *Garroby Hill* (figure 18), from the following year, the expanse of English countryside extends out to a distant horizon as the viewer crests the top of the hill and begins the descent.

The examples of roads stretching into the distance in Hockney's work from this period are too numerous to mention individually, however, one suite of watercolors from 2004 is notable for the way it approximates a car trip. The work, *Midsumer: East Yorkshire* (figure 19) is made up of thirty-six scenes, including thirteen pictures of main roads, two of side roads, and twenty-one of the various views one might see by looking to the left or right across the fields. In six of the watercolors, images of hay bales appear from different viewpoints, allowing the viewer to see the fields as if in motion around them. Adding to the drive-like quality of the suite is the fact that several of the pictures appear to be less finished sketches. This is analogous to the way one divides attention on a drive between quick glimpses and sustained looking, deciding to where to look and for how long.

---

[16] Ibid.,207.

[17] Lawrence Weschler, *True to Life: Twenty-five Years of Conversations with David Hockney* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008),104.

In 2010 Hockney began experimenting with a rig of nine high-definition video cameras that he attached to a car in order to film drives down rural Yorkshire lanes (figures 20-21). He exhibited the resulting work on nine- and eighteen-screen grids that hark back to the tiling of photos in his photocollage work. The videos were filmed while driving at a very slow speed with each camera angled slightly differently to capture an expanded view of the surrounding landscape. While the videos depict the act of driving, they also immerse the viewer in a wealth of detail that would be impossible to see from the car, such as the individual branches and leaves that the cameras register. After producing a number of multichannel video drives through the rural English countryside, Hockney used a similar technique on a smaller scale to film a Wagner Drive though the San Gabriel Mountains in California. The three-channel video, *The Wagner Drive* (figure 22), from 2012, was exhibited alongside his Yorkshire work in the 2013-2014 survey, *A Bigger Exhibition*. I discuss this video's relationship to the overall practice of the Wagner Drives at more length in Chapter 4.

Hockney's work is often interpreted through the lenses of medium and genre. It is useful to do this with an artist whose output is prolific across a range of different subjects and media. His recent exhibition of East Yorkshire landscape work, for example, filled London's Royal Academy of Art and its accompanying catalogue is a substantial volume. Over the years exhibitions have focused on his stage work, photography, printmaking, portraits, and many other aspects of his diverse oeuvre. By tracing the specific thread of car travel in Hockney's life and work, I am proposing that driving can be understood as a significant interpretive tool through which to understand many of his multifaceted artistic endeavors. To this end, the Wagner Drives are an indispensible case study, anomalous in his work, yet part and parcel of his artistic project.

Chapter 2

Experiencing the Wagner Drive

The Wagner Drives have been described in print by various passengers over the years. An early example is journalist Trip Gabriel's account from January 1993, in which he limns the experience of a drive with Hockney through Malibu Creek State Park.[1] Without actually calling the drive by a name, Gabriel gives details of the route and the playlist, highlighting the drive's important points of inflection, and noting at one point the similarity of Malibu to northern Spain, where the opera *Parsifal* is set. Descriptions of the Wagner Drives over time have tended to follow this format: brief citations of roads and music with varying degrees of specificity, which point to what Gabriel calls "a fantastic show" without the prolonged scrutiny that Hockney's other work sometimes receives. This is understandable; the drives' status as art has changed over time, due in part to early descriptions like Gabriel's.

However, given the nature of the Wagner Drives as multiple, fleeting, and operatic, I believe they can sustain a deeper examination, starting with the particular nuts and bolts of the experience. Through my conversations with Hockney, I have ascertained and documented driving directions, playlists, and timings for each of the three Wagner Drives, what I have come to call, in order of their development, the Malibu Canyon Road Drive, the Kanen Dume Road Drive, and the San Gabriel Mountain Drive. The last of the drives, in the San Gabriel Mountains, is the only one that Hockney still performs and is consequently the only one that I have experienced firsthand, with Hockney at the steering wheel. Nevertheless, based on information from my interviews, I initiated my own reperformances of the original two Malibu Drives with myself in the driver's seat.

---

[1] Trip Gabriel, "At Home With/David Hockney; Acquainted with the Light," *New York Times*, January 21, 1993, http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/21/style/at-home-with-david-hockney-acquainted-with-the-light.html?pagewanted=all

Although the San Gabriel Mountain Drive is chronologically the last of the Wagner Drives, it is the first to be given a museum presentation. In 2012, Hockney attached three cameras to the back of his car resulting in a forty-four minute, three-channel video that became part of the 2013-2014 survey, *A Bigger Exhibition*. *The Wagner Drive* video was oddly in dialogue yet incongruous with much of the East Yorkshire landscape work on exhibit. In the video, Hockney appears in the driver's seat of a top-down convertible with three passengers. The car is in the middle channel, which looks as if it is pasted on top of the two left and right channels behind it (figure 22). The whole picture, in typical Hockney photocollage fashion, looks like a puzzle that does not quite line up. Over the course of the video, the group drives a loop through the San Gabriel Mountains in the southwest corner of the Angeles National Forest, listening to the third of the Wagner Drive playlists.

In January 2015, Hockney took me on a ride through the San Gabriel Mountains. We left from his house in the Hollywood Hills at about three in the afternoon, in anticipation of a five o'clock sunset. Hockney pulled onto the eastbound Ventura Freeway around Griffith Park and shortly thereafter started the music. The first three selections were marches by John Philip Sousa—"Hands Across the Sea," "The Thunderer", and "The Belle of Chicago"—which lasted a total of about ten minutes, putting us on the Angeles Crest Highway at the entrance of the San Gabriel Mountain wilderness. The American military march music made the mood brisk and blithe as we drove along, as if in formation, among the hundreds of other cars in the light afternoon traffic.

Upon entering the wilderness, the marches gave way to Wagner's Entry of the Gods into Valhalla. This eight-minute excerpt is the closing scene of *Das Rheingold,* the first of four operas in Wagner's weeklong epic *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In *Rheingold*, the stage is set for generations of dramatic struggle to come over the possession of an all-powerful ring, forged from magic gold, that has been stolen from the Rhine River. In *Rheingold*'s opening scene, Alberich, the Nibelung of the title, steals a horde of gold from the Rhine Maidens and fashions the eponymous ring, only to have it stolen from him in turn by Wotan, the king of the gods. Wotan then uses the gold to pay the giants Fasolt and Fafner for their construction of Valhalla, the palace from which Wotan intends to rule of the world. As payment to the giants, Wotan reluctantly forfeits the ring, causing Fafner to slay Faslot in a paroxysm of greed. Much of the ensuing epic revolves in some way around Wotan's quests to repossess the ring.

The Entry of the Gods into Valhalla immediately follows Fafner's murder of Fasolt, and contains a series of narrative-musical moments. First, Donner, the god of thunder, summons all of the mists and hazes into a thunderstorm and sweeps the sky clean with the stroke of his hammer whereupon the god Froh casts a rainbow bridge across the valley. The rainbow music then segues into the Valhalla motif, one of the most prominent and recognizable leitmotifs throughout the tetralogy, which calls forth the glorious castle at the end of the rainbow. As the gods cross the bridge, Wotan sings:

> Evening light beams
> from the eye of the sun.
> In the glorious gleam
> the fortress sparkles proudly.

> In the morning light
> it gleamed boldly
> but it stood untenanted,
> grandly inviting, in front of me.
> Between morning and evening
> in trouble and fear,
> not pleasantly, it was acquired.
> Night draws on,
> from whose harm
> it offers shelter now."[2]

Wotan's wife Fricka asks what the name "Valhalla" means to which Wotan replies enigmatically that the answer will be revealed in time. The demigod Loge, foreseeing the demise of the gods that lust for the Rheingold has set in motion, voices his misgivings. As the gods enter their castle on high, the singing of the Rhine Maidens is heard like an echo from the depths. Their once frolicsome song now strikes a plaintive note, lamenting the loss of their gold and decrying as "[f]alse and cowardly…all that rejoices up there."[3]

In the Wagner Drives, Hockney uses an orchestral version of this scene in which the sung parts are substituted instrumentally. This choice accentuates the abstractness of Wagner's musical narration. For example, in the orchestral version, the music of the thunderstorm clearing into a rainbow is conjured in purely musical terms, rather than with the aid of language. Hockney's use of Wagner's music thus parallels and exploits the paradox at the heart of Wagner's leitmotif. Namely, leitmotifs are both utterly dependent on the narrative text to derive their meaning and yet function as autonomous units of musical narration in their own right. On the one hand, as Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker write, "so strong are the links between musical development and epic detail that it's impossible to understand singing, sound, motif, or harmony in the *Ring* without knowing the plot."[4] On the other hand, as one critic noted in an 1882 review of the *Ring* at Bayreuth, in the absence of the libretto's language, the leitmotifs supply the drama: "Physically incapacitated from reading the libretto during the performance, and infrequently able to follow the words by ear, owing to the general predominance of orchestral sound over vocal utterance, the Bayreuth audience was mainly dependent upon the Leit-Motiven for its guidance through the bewildering maze of the Nibelungen story and psychological phenomena."[5] As the leitmotifs become associated with narrative elements—characters, objects, emotions, states of mind—and then developed musically throughout the course of the epic, they undergo what "has been called the 'semanticization' of music, the motifs' gradual saturation with meanings."[6] As Froh cast his rainbow bridge from the car stereo, I rode with Hockney out of the city and into the mountains.

---

[2] Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, text completed in 1852, trans. William Mann, 1964 (Bayreuth: Warner Classics, 1991, conducted by Daniel Barenboim), 196.
[3] Ibid., 200.

By cuing this dramatic musical passage to the start of the mountain road, Hockney creates an operatic staging by superimposition. Entering the wilderness, I felt that the Angeles National Forest had been cast as the forest of Wagnerian mythology and we, the car's occupants, as the gods themselves, entering a more elevated realm. As we climbed into the mountains I caught glimpses of Los Angeles in the distance below, hazy in the late afternoon sunlight. In the *Ring*, Wagner sets up a hierarchy of worlds with the depths of the Rhine River at one extreme and the cloudy heights of Valhalla at the other. Somewhere in the mythical nether regions also lies Nibelheim, where the Nibelungs, a race of blacksmith dwarves, dwell in toil. In his analysis of the *Ring*, George Bernard

---

[4] Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 356.
[5] *The Theater*, vol. 5 (January-June 1882), 293-4, quoted in Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 356.
[6] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 357.

Shaw refers to Nibelheim as a mine. However, he writes, this "gloomy place need not be a mine: it might just as well be a match-factory…Or it might be a whitelead factory, or a chemical works, or a pottery, or a railway shunting yard, or a tailoring shop, or any other of the places where human life and welfare are daily sacrificed in order that some greedy foolish creature may be able to hymn exultantly to his Plutonic idol."[7]

By driving into the mountains, Hockney emphasizes in physical space the verticality of Wagner's imaginary structure of worlds. Twisting up the tortuous roads, as urban Los Angeles recedes from view, the traffic having become drastically sparser, one has the sense of becoming enveloped in a realm outside of the reality of quotidian toil. The Wagner Drives are a type of leisure driving, after all, and once a few miles into the forest, virtually the only engineering the eye can see is the road and a few overhead power lines. Encapsulating this contrast in the shift between worlds, Hockney has remarked about the San Gabriel Mountains, "I used to go up there, I'd drive up there, sometimes just walk around a bit, and then come back down here to the nonsense. That's what I'd feel. I'll come back to the nonsense now. It's all nonsense here."[8] Hockney's feeling while exploring the mountains underscores their role in the Wagner Drives as a space of contemplation, set apart from the prosaic nonsense of the world.

About five miles from the entrance of the wilderness, amid the musical Maidens' woeful yet golden exclamations, Hockney turned left from the Angeles Crest Highway onto the Angeles Forest Highway. As the imaginary curtain fell on *Rheingold*, he pressed play on a non-Wagnerian entr'acte of sorts: the first movement of Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major by Robert Schumann. This symphony, almost always referred to as the "Rhenish" Symphony, was composed at the end of 1850, during the same period that Wagner was writing the libretto for *Rheingold*. The Rhenish Symphony is so called on account of its inspiration: the region in Germany around the Rhine River known as the Rhineland. Schumann had moved to Düsseldorf in September of 1850 to take up a post as municipal music director and later that month visited the cathedral at Cologne, Düsseldorf's nearby neighbor on the Rhine.[9] Schumann's symphony of the Rhine is considered by some to be "one of the great German romantic musical landscapes."[10] The first movement, titled "Lebhaft" or "lively," with its grand and exuberant main theme, brings to mind a soaring journey down the Rhine. The rhythmic play of the melody between a triple and duple meter propels the movement forward with the energy of a mighty river. Coursing along the Angeles Forest Highway toward Big Tujunga Canyon Road, Schumann's first movement thus aptly parallels the forward motion of the car and the constantly fluctuating apprehension of landscape. The lower the sun set in the sky, the longer the shadows appeared cast from the undulating ridges, throwing mountain facets of various sizes completely into shade.

---

[7] George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring* (New York: Dover, 1967, republication of the fourth edition of 1923 as published by Constable & Co., London), 17. Citations refer to the Dover edition.
[8] David Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

Now on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, Hockney started the Prelude to Act I of Wagner's last opera *Parsifal*. In contrast to the evening twilight of the Entry of the Gods into Valhalla, *Parsifal*'s first act takes place at dawn, in the woodlands of Arthurian legend, where the Knights of the Holy Grail guard the Castle of Monsalvat. Wagner specifies the opening scene in his stage directions as "landscape in the style of the northern mountains of Gothic Spain…Daybreak."[11] The music, very still at first, rises slowly and coolly in the strings and reeds, until the trombones sound the warm chord of morning call, heralding the dawn and dispelling the slumber. A couple of minutes into the Prelude, Hockney spoke the first words since the music had started half an hour prior. "There's a big creature," he said, looking out of the window on the passenger's side, indicating a nearby mountainous formation dappled in the dusky chiaroscuro. "There's a big foot or claw."[12]

---

[9] For biographical information on Robert Schumann see John Daverio and Eric Sams, "Schumann, Robert," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed April 6, 2016,http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40704pg18.

[10] Phillip Huscher, Program Notes for Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op.97 (Rhenish), Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 2005.

Hockney's comment about the claw was spontaneous and casual, and the image it brought to mind was vaguely Wagnerian, or perhaps more generally mythological. In the context of a Wagnerian drive, however, the apparition of such a creature might be reminiscent of the second act of *Siegfried*, in which Fafner, now in the form of an evil dragon, jealously guards the horde of gold and the ring. The musical overlay at that moment in the drive, however, was *Parsifal*, not *Siegfried*, suggesting that Hockney's observation may have simply been a stray comment, with no Siegfriedian resonance, as one might make looking at the shapes of clouds.[13] This raises the question of the kind of attention Hockney himself was paying to various elements of the Wagner Drive and the kinds of attention that might be reasonably expected from his passengers. Reflecting on this moment, I wonder the extent to which Hockney's Wagnerian imagination was operating at full tilt, in expansive Wagnerian fashion.

---

[11] Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, text completed in 1877, trans. Lionel Salter, 1970 (Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, 1979-1980, conducted by Herbert von Karajan), 66.

[12] David Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 14, 2015.

[13] Lucy Beckett points out the similarities between Siegfried and Parsifal: "Like Siegfried, Parsifal is a fatherless innocent who attains adulthood through the discovery of desire and later supplants the fallen hero who has long awaited him. Both blunder into a complex situation they do not understand; both encounter an initiating woman possessed of all the knowledge that they lack." Lucy Beckett, "Parsifal," *Parsifal* (Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, 1979-1980, conducted by Herbert von Karajan), 33.

Interestingly, the claw-like mountain that Hockney observed on our ride in 2015 through the San Gabriel Mountains also resembles a picture he painted of the original drives in the Santa Monica Mountains. The picture, *The Red Mountain* (figure 15), from 1990, shows a sloping mound with finger-like inclines separated by shaded hollows. That similar natural formations from the Santa Monica and San Gabriel Mountains struck Hockney as noteworthy, with an interval of twenty-five years separating the experiences, attests to a particular kind of landscape that triggers his visual imagination, which is also compatible with his general Wagnerian interest.

Thus the Wagner Drives operate on two principles of superimposition. The first is specific: an inflection point as when the Valhalla motif plays upon entering the Angeles National Forest, superimposing the atmosphere, the castle, and all its dramatic implications onto the San Gabriel Mountains. By inflection points I mean the precise moments of coincidence, ones that are not interchangeable, in which a specific moment of music is timed to align with a specific piece of landscape. Of course not every note, phrase or crescendo is timed to coincide with every bend of the road or tree, but these inflection points are timed to synchronize in such a manner. They are precisely coordinated moments of coincidence throughout the drives that are more specific than the overall setting. The second type of superimposition is this more general setting: an overall mood, where musical dawn overlays actual dusk and Siegfried's foe might lurk in Parsifal's forest. The drives themselves mirror this interchangeableness of setting, albeit within defined parameters. The drive I went on with Hockney was set in the San Gabriel Mountains, over two decades after he had first created the drives in Malibu.

After the prelude to *Parsifal* ended the Transformation Music started, as if we had fast-forwarded from the beginning to the end of the first act. After the elderly knight Gurnemanz realizes that Parsifal is perhaps the innocent fool of prophesy who can heal the ailing King Amfortas, he—Gurnemanz—leads Parsifal from the woods "upwards through walls of rock," which then transform into the "mighty hall of the castle of the Grail."[14] The transformation occurs in more than merely the setting. As they start to walk, Parsifal says in wonderment, "I scarcely tread,/ yet seem already to have come far." "You see, my son," Gurnemanz replies, "time here becomes space."[15] The same spatiotemporal transformation is effected in the Wagner Drive itself. Hockney has laid out music, an art of time, spatially along a route. We had barely left Los Angeles, yet we seemed very far away. After the music ended, Hockney said, "We went up to four thousand feet and then came back down."[16] I mentioned Parsifal's entering Monsalvat and Hockney replied, "Space and time are the same thing. And that was before Einstein; that's the 1880s. Yes, time and space are one. Amazing insight actually, isn't it?"[17] It is an amazing insight, and one that Hockney has deployed to great effect in his work. His photocollages and videos serve as examples. By using nine cameras instead of one to record the Yorkshire countryside, Hockney multiplies the time and therefore the space that the picture includes. As we drove across the San Fernando Valley back in the direction of the Hollywood Hills, I could feel that the Wagner Drive had ended.

---

[14] Wagner, *Parsifal*, 84.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 14, 2015.
[17] Ibid.

The Playlists and The Types of Superimposition

The playlist of the San Gabriel Mountain Drive that I went on with Hockney very nearly matched the playlist of *The Wagner Drive* video that Hockney exhibited in *A Bigger Exhibition*. The video, however, shows less of the freeway journey to the mountains and therefore only leads into Wagner with a single march by Sousa, "Hands Across the Sea." One additional difference is the way the video ends. After the prelude to *Parsifal*, the video plays the second movement of Schumann's Rhenish Symphony instead of Wagner's Transformation Music, followed by Sousa's "Liberty Bell March," a prosaic coda on the way from the mountains back into the city.

This slight difference in the playlists of the San Gabriel Mountain Drive is testament to the flexibility of substitution within the framework of the Wagner Drive choreography. Indeed, the San Gabriel Mountain Drive has already substituted the San Gabriel for the Santa Monica Mountains and recalibrated the Wagnerian soundtrack. It is in keeping with the openness of the work to variations on a theme that a San Gabriel Mountain Drive from 2015 might substitute the Transformation Music for the second movement of the Rhenish Symphony. The adaptability of both site and playlist is closely related to the two types of superimposition, general and specific, employed in the drives' composition. General superimposition allows one or another enchanted Wagnerian forest to bind with one or another Los Angeles mountain range. By shifting between the musical landscapes of the *Ring*, *Parsifal*, and the Rhenish Symphony, the Wagner Drive in the San Gabriel Mountains activates a multivalence in the actual landscape. From the Rhenish Symphony to the opening moments of *Parsifal*, Hockney splices together the environs of the Rhine with the gothic dawn of northern Spain. In the case of the drive I went on with him, after the Rhenish Symphony he cut forward in *Parsifal* to the Transformation Music. In the video from a few years earlier, however, the Transformation Music is absent. In *The Wagner Drive* video, Hockney toggles instead from *Parsifal* back to the folksy melodies of the Rhineland, with the second movement, the Scherzo, of the Rhenish Symphony. These choices are questions of mood within the drive; they do not disturb the overall atmosphere because they do not alter the musical worlds already selected for superimposition. The difference between the finesse of timing individual musical excerpts and the more general atmosphere they create is exemplified by Hockney's own assessment of the drive he took me on. A few minutes after the music ended, he said, "A bit later would have been a little better. If I did it a few times, I'd time it righter and get things with the crescendos a little better." He then concluded, "It's very nice. I enjoyed it myself. The music and the landscape fit together, don't they?"[18] Hockney's comment identifies the two types of superimposition at work: the one specific that could have been a little bit righter and the other general that produced an enjoyable experience.

Timing specific crescendos or dynamic musical moments to align with moments in the continuously shifting visual environment creates points of inflection throughout the Wagner Drives. One such inflection point—indeed, the first such inflection point—which appears in all three Wagner Drives, is the Entry of the God into Valhalla. In each of the drives, the Valhalla music is cued in contrast to the lighter music of city driving and timed to synchronize with the ascent into the mountains. In the San Gabriel Mountain Drive, this inflection point comes where the Angeles Crest Highway starts to climb into the San Gabriel Mountains. Entering the wilderness, Sousa stops and Wagner begins. In the original forty-five minute drive through Malibu Canyon, the ascent begins as the car turns right from the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) onto Malibu Canyon Road. In the ninety-minute Malibu version, Hockney would drive farther up PCH and enter the mountains at Kanen Dume Road. It was on the foundation of these inflection points that I built my efforts to reperform the original drives.

---

[18] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 14, 2015.

The Malibu Canyon Road Drive

Returning to Hockney's house after the conclusion of the San Gabriel Mountain Drive, I spoke with him about the details of the original drives in Malibu. By studying the drives as originally conceived, I hoped to add to my understanding of what exactly they were. In ascertaining information about the original drives, we spoke in terms of routes, playlists, and inflection points, which Hockney was recalling now decades after he had stopped performing them. In order to learn the inflection points, it was necessary to speak specifically about timing. "I'd go through Malibu Canyon and then up round the back and when I got right at the top, there was the music from Siegfried's Funeral March and when the crescendo came you just suddenly saw the setting sun over the sea, *suddenly*, with the crescendo, and it was fantastic."[19] Here, Hockney was describing an inflection point that is absent from the San Gabriel Mountain Drive. Both Siegfried's Funeral March and the views of the Pacific Ocean are elements that only feature in the two drives through the Santa Monica Mountains. The precise moment that Hockney was referring to, however, remained difficult for me to pinpoint. I thought I knew which crescendo he was speaking of, but I was not sure of its exact placement along the route.

---

[19] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

I asked Hockney if the Siegfried crescendo was a moment in both the Malibu Canyon and Kanen Dume Road Drives. "Yes, I think so. I'm not that certain now, because I'm not that certain what music I was playing..." Hockney trailed off for a few seconds and then said, "I'd have to listen to it a bit…I mean you could do it with other bits of Wagner, I'm sure. You can time it…if you can time it right, it's a spectacular drive."[20] I told him that I was timing the first drive so that *Rheingold* ends at the right turn from Malibu Canyon Road onto Piuma Road. "It should end," he said, "just at the last bit of that road. So what you do is you start it just a tiny bit later. You've to start the music and finish it. So you can press a button and it starts it and if you want to get the right timing you then just calculate well, okay, that was another four hundred yards so I'll start it four hundred yards afterwards, then you go back. That's how I put it together, doing it like that. When I wanted a crescendo, okay, well I'll drive back now and find it."[21]

Hockney's attitude toward my versions of his Wagner Drives was that they could be practiced and tweaked. He had done it one way, but there were other possible ways to pair a Wagnerian crescendo with the shifting vistas of a Southern California mountain range. While my versions were as close as I could get to what I thought Hockney had done in the nineties, I am nevertheless certain there are inevitable minor and acceptable differences based on the fact that I am a different performer. The adjustability of the drives also raises the question of their identity on the spectrum between aestheticized driving and performance art. Without instructions, documentation, or art historical scholarship to frame them, it has been unclear for much of their history that the Wagner

---

[20] David Hockney, in conversation with the author, July 27, 2015.
[21] Ibid.

Drives fall squarely within the parameters of performance art. However, it is possible to construe the drives as a practice that has become performance art over time. This happens as they are increasingly couched in performance art terms, a development that is connected to their gradual accrual of documentation. My efforts to perform, record, and analyze the Wagner Drives couch them in these very terms. In presenting them with this identity I understand myself to be participating in its construction.

After rehearsing in Malibu with the maps and notes from my conversations with Hockney, I started to perform the Malibu Canyon Road Drive for friends and family. I leave the intersection of PCH and Las Flores Canyon Road, the location of Hockney's beach house, about forty-five minutes before the sunset. As I drive west along the southern-facing beach, I start the song "America" from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*. "America" is a catchy and rollicking mid-twentieth century song about the virtues of immigrant life in New York City, sung by two Puerto Rican characters, Rosalia and Anita. The song takes the form of a point-counterpoint discussion in which Rosalia waxes nostalgic about life in Puerto Rico, the "lovely island…of tropical breezes" where pineapples grow and coffee blossoms bloom.[22] Anita replies by pointing out the comfort and promise of their new life in America. In the second chorus, for example, all except Rosalia sing the praises of the American Dream they picture, with emphasis on the connection to car culture: "Automobile in America,/ Chromium steel in America,/ Wire-spoke wheel in America,/ Very big deal in America!"[23]

Hockney first visited Los Angeles, where he learned how to drive, in 1964, less than a decade after the premiere of *West Side Story*. In a sense, his experience was a version of the happy ideal of mid-century immigrant life in America. Though Hockney had gained renown in England during his student days, it was his early Los Angeles paintings that would solidify his international popularity. The depiction of a swimming pool in *A Bigger Splash* (1967)*,* for example, is an idealized picture of the pleasures of sun and water on offer in Southern California. Embedded in the picture is the allure of a lifestyle of comfort, relaxation, and leisure. These pleasures are present as well while driving along the Pacific Coast Highway at sunset. Listening to "America," on the coast highway, I am put in mind of several transpositions taking place: Hockney, an English immigrant in Los Angeles was listening to a Puerto Rican story of immigration to New York. The island of Puerto Rico is transposed to the island of England; New York is transposed to Los Angeles; and the American Dream is particularized as the California Dream.

---

[22] Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, *West Side Story*, 1956 (Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, 1985, conducted by Leonard Bernstein), 27.
[23] Ibid.

Driving along this glamorous stretch of Malibu beach to a soundtrack of joyous immigrant optimism, I find it easy to imagine myself in a tropical paradise, ensconced in the lap of American comfort. As the sun starts to set, it drops slightly below the line of the mountains that rise up from the gentle curve of the road. Rounding the mountain, the sun shines through the backlit palm trees that dot the canyon bluffs, washing the landscape in a warm golden glow and casting a gleam on the surface of the darkening sea. Against the Latin tinge of Bernstein's "America," I feel the leisure of one who has arrived at a charming beach to watch the sunset. In the last chorus of the song the singers exclaim: "I like the shores of America!/ Comfort is yours in America!" after which they proceed to dance.[24] In my timing of the drive, “America” comes to its high-spirited finale as I make the first of a series of right turns, from PCH onto Malibu Canyon Road.

Once on Malibu Canyon Road, I climb into the hills to the music of gods entering Valhalla, as I imagine Hockney had done. Now climbing into the canyon, I become aware of being surrounded by hills on either side, cut down the middle by the road. To the right, glimpses of the Pacific Ocean grow more and more intermittent, as we head into the gorge. Along this stretch of road, the majority of the mountains lie in shadow except for their highest extremities, which are hit here and there by the sunbeams that the mountain ridges fail to block. The first big musical buildup peaks almost three minutes into the track, with the sound of Donner’s hammer-stroke, followed by a rumbling timpani for a few seconds before we hear the suddenly clear sky, sparklingly traversed by the rainbow bridge. This musical moment coincides with the car rounding the curve that leads into our first long view of the valley we are entering. A few moments later the Valhalla leitmotif sounds.

I time the Entry of the Gods to climax and subside by the time the car reaches Piuma Road. Turning right, and continuing the ascent, I start the Prelude to Act I of *Parsifal*. Piuma Road winds up the mountain in a series of switchbacks. This forces the position of the sun and the mountains into a constant physical reversal of position in relation to the car, at times effecting an almost blinding glare. Cresting the mountains, heading east along the summit, the Pacific Ocean darts occasionally, momentarily back into view, far below on the passenger’s side. The automobile’s “mode of perception characterized by speed and surface” is what Mitchell Schwartzer refers to as the

---

[24] Ibid., 29.

"zoomscape."[25] "The aesthetics of the automobile view," he writes, "are shaped by the brief encounter, a quick and potent mix of vision with form that almost instantaneously evaporates."[26] The same is true of the aural mode of perception as it relates to the music along the route. The music, like the car, is constantly moving. Brief encounters with notes and phrases turn into momentary musical shapes, prominently present, sometimes lingering, often slipping away. The soft rays of dawn that Parsifal's opening melody describes, flash fleetingly, swelling, subsiding, and eventually evaporating.

As the Prelude to *Parsifal* ends, I start the musical interlude of Siegfried's Funeral March. This musical selection contains the climatic inflection point of the original drives, which is missing from the San Gabriel Mountain version. This music's grand crescendo is timed to coincide with a suddenly revealed view of the twilit ocean. Hockney says, "if I'd got it right—and I had to come through just this little thing, a little tunnel almost and then it broke out—and if I'd got it right, it was fantastic."[27] In the Kanen Dume Road Drive, this crescendo comes at the Topanga Lookout Trailhead, about four miles after turning south onto Stunt Road from Mulholland Highway. From this lookout one is able to survey vast distances in all directions, a spectacular 360-degree panorama. Looking to the north one can see the mountains and the many parallel ridges that form the various canyons extending west for forty miles. Looking south one can see the descent, the coastal highway, and the limitless ocean extending to infinity. When approached from Stunt Road, The Topanga Lookout Trailhead vista is a sudden revelation. The mountains that block the view of the ocean suddenly stop, or rather, the car is finally on top of the mountains after climbing up the meandering road. In the

---

[25] Mitchell Schwartzer, *Zoomscape* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press),12.
[26] Ibid., 72.
[27] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

Malibu Canyon Road Drive, which does not pass the Topanga Lookout, I sought to synchronize the climatic music with the moment when the descent from the mountain begins.

In Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, or *Twilight of the Gods*, Siegfried's funeral music comes in the immediate aftermath of his murder by Hagan, who had orchestrated the killing with intentions of claiming the ring. Siegfried's killing is the penultimate scene in the tetralogy, linked to the final scene by means of the funeral march. Thomas Grey observes that the funeral music is "a genealogy of the hero in an epic or Biblical manner. Its concision is due, in part, to the omission of any reference to the hero's encounters with his adversaries…that would only distort the high-toned dignity of the moment…Wagner's symphonic interlude assumes a compact, somewhat cautious 'evolutionary' form," in which the rhythm of the "triumphant acclamations of the central climax…alternates with Siegfried's motives: that which prophesied his birth in *Die Walküre* and the heroic variant of his horn-call from the prologue of the present opera."[28] As Siegfried's funeral procession transforms into the final scene of the epic, it foreshadows the catastrophe of the drama. Wotan's last hope for the ring—Siegfried—is dead and night is falling on the gods. In the last moments, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, sets fire to Valhalla, casts the ring back into the depths of the Rhine, sings of her love for Siegfried, and commits suicide by throwing herself on the conflagration.

On the way down the mountain, rounding one of the final bends on Piuma Road before it becomes Rambla Pacifico Street, the view from the front windshield becomes the Pacific Ocean. This is the most direct vantage thus far in the drive from which to survey the water. To the passenger's side, from across a steep ravine, looms the vast sheer face of a mountain ridge, now covered completely in shadow. Just above the line of the mountain ridge glows the yellow-orange halo of the sun's light, which continues in a ribbon along the sea's horizon-line once the mountain ends. If it had been a few minutes later, this part of the drive would not have been visible. Instead, when timed right, the occupants of the car are witness to a moment of spectacular stagecraft right before the house goes dark.

---

[28] Thomas Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 82-83.

Arthur Kolat. Video Still from *The Malibu Canyon Road Drive*, 2015

Through the course of my reperformances of the Malibu Canyon Road Drive, I evaluated this inflection point of Siegfriedian climax as one might interpret an operatic staging. That is to say, by critically examining aptness, vividness, and cleverness of the mise-en-scène and by assessing the connections that the particular production draws out of the original operatic material, I understand this moment of the Malibu Canyon Road

Drive to function effectively in the following ways: First, the moment in the *Ring* and the moment in the drive coincide. Each is the penultimate turning point that leads into a dramatic denouement. Second, both the music and the drive recapitulate their central themes. The march does this musically, through the themes that Grey sees as constituting a "genealogy." The drive, for its part, visually recapitulates the themes of ocean, mountain, and sunset in their grandest arrangement so far, at the moment of descent from the mountain to PCH. Third, the drive mirrors the hierarchical Wagnerian world structure of the final scene of the *Ring*, in which the lofty realms of Valhalla and the subaquatic realms of the Rhine are simultaneously audible. Siegfried's death sets this final scene on its inevitable path. The drive makes this water-earth-mountain world structure not only at once visually available, but also physically felt. The car, after all, is traveling headlong down a mountain. Fourth, both the final moments of the drive and final moments of the opera make manifest a splendiferous interplay of colors and elements. After Brünnhilde returns the gold ring to the Rhine Maidens in the water, Wagner's last stage directions are: "She [Brünnhilde] jumps on the horse and leaps, with a single bound into the burning pyre. When the whole stage space looks to be filled with flames, the firelight suddenly dies down, and soon only a cloud of smoke is left. At the same time the Rhine overflows its banks and pours its tide over the fire. The three Rhinemaidens swim up on a wave and appear above the pyre."[29] The drive foreshadows this impending operatic tragedy by positioning its participants in the shadows of the mountains, watching the fiery golden ball of the sun extinguish its light by sinking into the waters of the Pacific. The fact that Siegfried's Funeral March was cut from the playlist in the San Gabriel Mountains strongly suggests that it was this particular confluence of sunset in the mountains by the sea, whose equivalent Hockney did not find in the mountains further inland.

---

[29] Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, text completed 1874, trans. William Mann, 1964 (Bayreuth: Warner Classics, 1991, conducted by Daniel Barenboim), 226.

In my version of the Malibu Canyon Road Drive, I stop the music after Siegfried's Funeral March, letting the remaining minutes of the road to PCH occur in silence. In the week I spent practicing the two versions of the drives in Santa Monica, I focused my attention more on the Malibu Canyon Road Drive, the shorter of the two. In the longer version, The Kanen Dume Road Drive, which requires more music, it was less clear to me how Hockney had arranged the playlist. I knew, for example, that in order to reach Kanen Dume Road from Las Flores Canyon Road, Hockney would play Strauss's "Blue Danube" waltz after "America" from *West Side Story*. I also knew that there were other orchestral versions of Wagner selections from the EMI Classics recording of Overtures and Preludes conducted by Sir Adrian Boult—*Parsifal*'s Good Friday Music, for example. Although reperforming the Kanen Dume Road Drive would require a level of practice that I have not yet committed to it, I believe nevertheless that I have understood the formula of broad musical overlay and specific punctuation that constitute the Wagner Drive choreography.

Hockney's Intentions

It may seem that my level of attentiveness is mismatched to the open architecture of the Wagner Drives. It would be if it were only a matter of making an inventory of their content. I think, however, that my analysis can be justified as an investigation into the richness of correspondences that might be imagined given the complexity of the musical material and the impulse to understand the fundamental question of the drives: that is, what it means for music and landscape to match. My foregoing reading of the Wagner Drives therefore relies on a scrutiny of the musical selections and their contexts—narrative, musical, theatrical—which I believe the drives to be engaging. This kind of reading, however, raises the questions of the type of attention Hockney anticipated others would pay to the experience of the Wagner Drives and what he was hoping to achieve by performing them. I believe, based my conversations with him, that while he sees the drives as developing out of his work as an operatic stage designer, he is not beholden to a the kind of heavily operatic reading that I have suggested. Hockney's main claim is open-ended: the music and the landscape fit together well.

Before I had gone on the San Gabriel Mountain Drive with Hockney, I asked him about the nature of his driving piece, which in contrast to most of his other work does not result in any object or depiction. "I thought the drive was a four-dimensional experience," Hockney said,

> and therefore couldn't be done. I thought you couldn't film it, really. I mean, you can't, really. Not compared to the real drive. And the real drive was done, originally, about twenty-five years ago when I'd got a new sound system put in this Mercedes car, because I'm going deaf. So somebody had this new system and I thought oh it's very good, I could hear the music so I got one put in. And then I was listening to Wagner and just driving in the mountains and I realized: they matched. The music and what you were seeing went rather well together, I thought.[30]

In describing how the music and the landscape fit together, Hockney cites the reactions of his passengers, saying that if he had timed it right, people would notice. The prime example of this is the climax in Siegfried's Funeral March, which Gabriel describes in the *New York Times* as follows: "The ascent was timed so that the opera swelled to the mighty peak of a crescendo precisely as he [Hockney] reached Saddle Peak Road, where a 200-mile panorama opened, from Santa Monica Bay across all of Los Angeles to the snowy San Bernardino Mountains."[31]

---

[30] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

What it means for music and landscape to match in Hockney's mind versus in the minds of his passengers is open to interpretation. For example, Hockney describes the germ of the idea that music and landscape could match conceptually in an anecdote of an early eighties car trip he took to Las Vegas. "I was driving through Nevada to Las Vegas, and listening to Handel's *Messiah*, and it was very, very good in the car. And then I realized: all religions come from the desert, don't they? Somebody contemplating the cosmos in the desert. And I thought, ahh…"[32] For Hockney the desert landscape had matched the setting of the spiritual vision. The similar process of matching visual scenery to a musical narrative was also an important conceptual aspect of Hockney set design. "All the operas I'd ever done were all based on the music. *The Rake's Progress*, the first one, it's still done…*The Magic Flute* was also done with the music. *Parade* at the Met was. *Turandot* was. And the last one was *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. That was too. Always with the music. Each one, I think the sets made you hear the music."[33] For Hockney, one aspect of matching scenery to music was the scenery's ability to enhance the music. Driving through the Nevada desert, he had heard Handel's music in a fresh way.

As with an evening at the opera house, what one hears in the music of the Wagner Drive will differ from person to person. When I pointed out to Hockney, for example, that hearing Wotan's music at the beginning of Malibu Canyon Road fit with the sunbeams streaking across the valley, he emphasized that knowing the plot was not necessary. In Hockney's mind Sousa is music "for domestic architecture" and Wagner is music for which "you need big nature," but he says his passengers always seemed to understand this intuitively, even if they had no idea who Siegfried was or why he died.[34] "Even if they didn't know Wagner, it didn't matter. I took some kids on it once. They said it's like a movie, meaning you're listening and looking."[35]

---

[31] Gabriel, "At Home With/David Hockney."
[32] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.
[33] Ibid.

Hockney is interested in reactions like these from his passengers. In discussing my versions of the drive with him, he wanted to know how my passengers had responded. I told him that they had found it to be a deeply absorbing experience because the arresting landscape and stirring music grip the attention of the car's occupants. After the drives, Hockney says, as his passengers got out of the car, "their experience of life was more intense for forty-five minutes than the previous forty-five had been. Yes, and mine was as well, because I enjoyed it as well, of course. I'm really taking it all in as well, even though I'm driving."[36] Thus the drive for Hockney was a four-dimensional, dramatic, musical, and cinematic ride through a striking natural landscape designed to be experienced intensely and enjoyed.

---

[34] Hockney, in conversation with the author, July 27, 2015.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

Chapter 3

Do The Wagner Drives Matter as a Moment in Modernism/Postmodernism?

David Hockney’s Wagner Drives are a radical experiment in genre and medium at the turn of the 1990s, which exists in tension with different sets of concerns from the history of art, ranging from Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk and Romanticism, via modernism and postmodernism, through to contemporary concerns of performance art, reperformance, and documentation. First, the Wagner Drives are a new and modified conception of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, both in the relationships they establish between various media and in their blurring of the distinctions between art and reality. Second, through their soundtrack and contemplation of the natural world, they resonate with prominent themes and attitudes of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Third, the Wagner Drives embrace the mechanical modernity of montage and mobility and thus create a type of cinematic experience. Fourth, the drives draw on performative, ephemeral, immaterial, and durational strategies from the advent of postmodernism, while managing to break several additional frames: not only the photographic, painterly, and proscenium frames, but the institutional and commercial frameworks as well.

For this last reason, the Wagner Drives exist, shorn even of the past trappings of performative art practice, insouciant about their own status, preservation, documentation, and study. Because of this insouciance, much of their ontology and therefore their potential position in art history are thrown into question. From an ontological standpoint the following questions arise: Is being in the car with Hockney himself the only way to experience a Wagner Drive? If not, what degree of alteration can the drives undergo and what degree of artist supervision do they require? From an art historical standpoint, the drives question their place—as all innovative works do—between a resonance with historical practices and an anticipation of practices to come.

The Gesamtkunstwerk, the Leitmotif, and the Interrelation of the Arts

The Wagner Drives' relationship to the Gesamtkunstwerk can be tracked by examining Wagner's own ideas about the realization of his music dramas in light of the idiosyncratic mise-en-scène that Hockney employs. In two essays from 1849, Wagner advanced his theory of the Gesamtkunstwerk, in which he saw the sister arts of poetry, music, and dance fusing together, "severing in richest contrast and re-uniting in most blissful harmony."[1] The art historian Juliet Koss notes that the Gesamtkunstwerk has often been read in stark opposition to the modernism it preceded. On the one hand, the Gesamtkunstwerk prizes narrative, duration, space, and the interrelation of the arts. On the other hand, Greenbergian modernism values anti-narrative abstraction, emptying out of space, autonomy of the art object, and medium specificity.

However, Koss argues that the unification of the arts that the Gesamtkunstwerk called for was founded on Wagner's theories of purity and medium specificity. Greenberg's modernism therefore, which centers on the ability of an artistic medium to express what is specific and essential to itself, belongs to the history of the idea of medium specificity, a history to which the Gesamtkunstwerk also reacts. The latter, Koss points out, unified the arts in order to allow each individual art to negotiate "its own formal parameters and [discover] its own identity only in the presence of the others."[2] The Gesamtkunstwerk thus maintains and at the same time levels the concepts of autonomy and purity. Therefore, Koss claims, "modernism itself must be understood in reference to the theoretical elaboration and historical development of the Gesamtkunstwerk."[3] To that end, Koss enlists various episodes in modernism, including the Bauhaus and the development of cinema, to demonstrate the continued relevance of Wagner's project to modernist concerns.

---

[1] Richard Wagner, "The Art-work of the Future" in *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works by Richard Wagner*, trans. by William Aston Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 1993, reprinted from Volume 1 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* as published in London by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd, 1895), 96. Citations refer to the University of Nebraska edition.

In addition to the original trio of poetry, music, and dance, Wagner deployed architecture as part of his effort to merge art and life. In 1876, he opened the Festival Theater at Bayreuth, an opera house that was purpose-built for the production of his music dramas. "The building," writes Koss, "was to encourage a fully reciprocal relationship between the work of art and its audience."[4] Wagner's aspiration for this relationship was that the "spectator transplants himself upon the stage, by means of all his visual and aural faculties…the public…forgets the confines of the auditorium, and lives and breathes now only in the artwork which seems to it as Life itself, and on the stage which seems the wide expanse of the whole World."[5] One innovation in this regard was the new custom, initiated at Bayreuth, of turning off the house lights during performances. Prior to Bayreuth, operatic audiences had been able to read the librettos and so follow the twists and turns of the plot. At Bayreuth, however, which was "veiled in Cimmerian darkness," Wagner sought to signal narrative development through the musical device of the leitmotif.[6]

---

[2] Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxvi.
[3] Ibid., xiii.
[4] Ibid., 25.
[5] Wagner, "The Art-work of the Future," 185.

Wagner used hundreds of leitmotifs, small bits of recurring musical information, to represent a host of different entities in his operas. One example among many is the Valhalla motif, discussed in Chapter 2. The motifs supply emotional information and dramatic insight about the unfolding events, often foreshadowing future drama or connecting back to earlier moments. The motifs are thus multivalent: the Valhalla motif, for example, portrays not only the majesty of the Valhalla palace, but functions also through metonymy to convey the nobility of Wotan and the lofty realms of his kingdom. In the second scene of Act I of *Die Walküre,* as the mortal Siegmund tells the story of becoming separated from his father as a child, the Valhalla motif signals to the audience that Siegmund's father is indeed Wotan. Wagner used the technique of leitmotivic development elaborately in the four operas of the *Ring* cycle, with the effect that motifs could be combined, embellished, and contorted to a range of expressive ends. Richard Taruskin points to one such passage of "ingenious juxtapositions" at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*, as a character known as the Third Norn prophesies the impending tragedy. As she "foretells the disastrous end of the drama, when flames shall in predestined retribution engulf Valhalla and consume the once-eternal gods, the orchestra sounds the Treaty, Valhalla, Götterdämmerung, and Fate themes in close succession, their progress punctuated by a timpani tattoo of which the rhythm, ever since the entr'acte following the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, had played the role of a bad omen."[7] At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, as Valhalla is annihilated in the baleful conflagration, the Valhalla motif comes back with a vengeance, in flashes and blazes of modulated tragic glory, interpenetrated by a swirl of other symbolic sounds.

---

[6] *The Theater*, vol. 5 (January-June 1882), 293-4, quoted in Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 356.
[7] Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 516.

This type of motivic development exemplifies Wagner's claim that in the Gesamtkunstwerk the individual art forms show their specificity through the act of their interrelation. In other words, music works in unity with drama, but in a way that is specific to its medium: through the development of musical motifs. Further, through motivic signals in a dark auditorium, the mise-en-scène aims to transport the spectator and in so doing to blur the distinction between art and life. Wagner's total artwork was not one that took place merely on the stage, but rather in the dark spaces all around the audience members in the theater.

Hockney's Wagner Drives are a late-twentieth-century variation of the Gesamtkunstwerk, which employ the imaginative power of Wagner's leitmotifs in a fusion of vision, audition, and motion that hovers between art and reality. In the drives, not only are Wagner's original leitmotifs present to conjure their mythical worlds, but Hockney's use of fragments from different operas itself multiplies the effect of leitmotivic interpenetration. In the Malibu Canyon Road Drive, for example, the first opera of the *Ring* plays as views of the ocean recede and a drive through the mountains commences. *Parsifal* is then the guiding theme for much of the mostly mountainous terrain, with the last opera of the *Ring* returning as the car reemerges from the mountains to a panorama of the water. The water, glimpsed intermittently to one's left and right on the first stretches of the drive, appears in more comprehensive view from the car's front window near the end. This joins the *Ring*, as higher-order leitmotif, with a visual counterpart that is correspondingly developed. Following this logic, Hockney's different musical juxtapositions on different versions of the drive might be thought of as clusters of modular combination, like different sequences of leitmotifs within the same opera.

A suggestive parallel exists between the Gesamtkunstwerk and the Wagner Drives in terms of their synthesis of the musical and visual domains. In Wagner's original formulation, the arts of poetry, music, and dance are sisters "so mutually bound up in each other's life" that if one becomes "unlinked from the united chain and bereft thus of her own life and motion, [she] can only carry on an artificially inbreathed and borrowed life; —not giving forth her sacred ordinances, as in their trinity, but now receiving despotic rules for mechanical movement."[8] The musical juxtapositions in the drives are likewise bound up with the visual world of the expanded staging. In artworks of mixed media this unlinking can indeed debilitate a constituent medium. In operatic performance, for example, the visual component cannot survive without the music. In the cinematic experience the audio track cannot survive without the picture. In the Wagner Drives, however, neither listening to music nor driving through landscape is an individual art conventionally construed, though both indeed produce aesthetic experiences. Consequently, the visual and musical elements of the drives are viable aesthetic experiences when separated one from the other. That is, the Wagner Drives are not comprised of Wagner's sister arts. Neither driving nor listening to a CD has the same art or artifice as writing poetry or choreographing dance does. This makes it even more difficult to distinguish the Wagner Drives from reality. It is only in Hockney's pairing of the two activities that they are framed as the constituent arts of a unified work and gain the ability to both define and erase their own boundaries. Through its suggestion to Hockney of Wagner's music, the visual experience identifies where its capacity ends. At this point, the drive's central concerns—emotions, drama, displays of natural phenomena—are taken up in the musical realm.

---

[8] Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," 95.

Romanticism

The projection of Wagner's intensely expressive musical realm onto the realm of magnificent nature begs the question of the Wagner Drives' connection to concerns that were prevalent among the artists, poets, and thinkers of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Romanticism, however, is a very broad term, one that has posed generations of historians with the challenge of its definition. The intellectual historian A.O. Lovejoy, for example, introduces his lecture "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas" by saying that the word Romanticism "has acquired so many—and such incongruous and opposed—meanings that no lexicographer has ever yet come near to enumerating them correctly and exhaustively."[9] Romanticism, he continues, "has no generally understood meaning and has therefore come to be useless as verbal symbol."[10] The art historian Hugh Honour, writing almost forty years after Lovejoy, starts his book on the subject with a similar claim: "Definitions of Romanticism tend to be so general as to include a bewildering number of characteristics, most of which are to be found in other periods and cultures, or so specific that they exclude the majority of those commonly ascribed to the Romantics."[11] With this central caveat in mind, I wish to explore what Lovejoy calls, following Goethe, the "elective affinities" between ideas present in the Wagner Drives and those that distinguish the Romantic period. This process reveals that while the

---

[9] Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* vol. 2, no. 3 (June 1941): 258.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 13.

Wagner Drives engage a handful of plausibly Romantic themes, ultimately, to call the drives Romantic is to deploy a term with many entangled meanings and much historical baggage. A more productive analysis of Romanticism in the drives requires parsing the word Romantic into its less confusing constituent themes. This provides a more apposite way of locating the drives as resonant with particular concerns from within the constellation of prevalent nineteenth-century ideas and attitudes.

One of the "basic or germinal ideas" that Lovejoy recognizes as belonging to the Romantic period "was a new or, at all events, a much wider and intensified vogue of the highly abstract and equivocal term 'infinite.'"[12] He notes that the idea of infinity itself had different meanings in the nineteenth century depending on the person employing it, but that a feature common to many definitions was a sense of the "not-limited or not-completed, the *Unbegrenzt* or *Unvollendet*…"[13] As examples of this, Lovejoy cites three favorite phrases of the early German Romantics—*Streben ins Unendliche, Sehnsucht nach dem Unendlichen*, and *Annäherung zu einer unendlichen Grösse*—which he says were "expressions of their ideal of life or of art."[14] In English these could be rendered as "infinite striving," "longing for the infinite," and "approaching an infinite immensity," respectively.[15]

One particular manifestation of striving for, longing for, and approaching infinity appears in Immanuel Kant's theory of the mathematical sublime. The art historian James Elkins provides a summary of Kant's concept in four moments, using Kant's example of the starry sky: First, a viewer is confronted with "an experience of something unencompassable, so large that it exceeds our capacity for comprehension." Second, the viewer "tries to employ some concept to help her comprehend the incomprehensible heavens: say for example the concept of infinity." Third, "it becomes clear that the 'manifold' object is too expansive to be understood." Fourth, "the viewer realizes that her innate capacity to reason is what drives the desire to encompass an unencompassable object with an inadequate concept."[16] In Kant's formulation it is not in the object that the sublimity resides, but rather in the object's ability to excite a particular chain of reasoning in its presence, a presence that has overwhelmed imagination. Kant writes: "But because there is in our imagination a striving toward infinite progress and in our reason a claim for absolute totality, regarded as a real idea, therefore this very inadequateness for that idea in our faculty for estimating the magnitude of things of sense excites in us the feeling of a supersensible faculty."[17] The mathematical sublime is a prominent instance of infinity defined through incompleteness, which Lovejoy associates with Romanticism. Incompleteness appears in the mathematical sublime both in the senses' inability to comprehend objects of immense magnitude and in the supersensible faculty's inability to come to proper terms with the object. This ushers in endless striving in the act of contemplation, a striving whose goal is conceptual understanding.

---

[12] Lovejoy, "Meaning of Romanticism," 262.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Translations by the author.

Resisting the temptation to label the Wagner Drives as artworks of the mathematical sublime, I concede that it is almost impossible to understand them without recognizing their relationship to notions of infinity and endlessness. Labeling the Wagner Drives as sublime, however, risks evaluating them according to an "historicallybounded term," which Elkins argues, "needs to be abandoned as an interpretive tool, except in the cases of romantic and belated romantic art. Contemporary writers who use the word can always find synonyms to express what they mean, and those synonyms are apt to be more telling, and more useful, than the word 'sublime.'"[18] The more useful discussion of the Wagner Drives, one that relates it back to Romanticism via sublimity, revolves around the ways—both musical and scenic—in which the drives confront the infinite.

---

[16] James Elkins, *Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980-2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 28-29.
[17] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 88.

From a musical point of view, one way the drives evoke the infinite is through the transcendence of time in Wagner's musical worlds. In his analysis of the *Ring*, for example, Taruskin refers to each of the four operas as partially enacting "the all encompassing world-epic," which ruptures linear time and "interrelates and intermeshes past, present and future, producing the tenseless time that myths inhabit. This, of course, was the very thing the tissue of letimotives was devised to portray…"[19] Throughout the *Ring*, the woven texture of leitmotifs produces an infinity of time, from the primeval flow of the Rhine River to the final transcendent declaration of love by Brünnhilde for Siegfried. In the final moment of the epic, the Rhine overflows its banks, literally transgressing its limits, immense and unable to be contained. There are many other symbols of the infinite in Wagner's work, but let it suffice for the present discussion to note that the musical attitudes in the Wagner Drives, from the Rhine Maidens' longing to Parsifal's questing, are apt to produce feelings of the unlimited and incomplete.

The elements of infinity at work in the landscape of the Wagner Drives are also everywhere apparent. Hockney describes his confrontation with the infinite upon first settling into his Malibu beach house. Being

---

[18] James Elkins, "Against the Sublime" in *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science,* ed. Roald Hoffmann and Iain Boyd Whyte (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75-77.
[19] Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, 509-510.

> in that house, in that little studio, I was constantly aware that on one side was nature in its awe-inspiring grandeur, its infinity, looking out at the sea, with its living edge, endlessly moving even when I sleep, endlessly moving for thousands and thousands of years. The mountains behind are not very high, perhaps 2,500 feet, but they are majestic. Some of them have great thrusts. You can see in them the violence of nature that at one time made that thrust and also the calm of nature, now that the thrust has ceased. And you look over the other hill and there is another endless thrust going on, the sea itself. So, living in that little spot, trapped as it were between the mountains and the edge of the water, I was very aware of nature both in its physical forms and in its invisible forces.[20]

Hockney's creation of the Wagner Drives coincides with his experience of nature's infinity in Malibu and the drives themselves reflect this heightened awareness.

The sea, the mountains, and the sunset all conspire in the drives to direct the passenger's attention toward the experience of infinite nature. The sea, as Hockney observes, is endlessly moving, and in the context of the Wagner Drives it also stands for the vast, fantastic world beneath the surface where mermaids swim and magic gold glints. Looking toward the horizon, the sea appears infinite and never completely knowable, still mysterious despite human efforts to navigate and explore it. Likewise, the mountain roads lead to heights from which hazy ridges extend to the horizon. On the drive, this can provoke the feeling that one is exploring the corner of an enormous landscape that contains untold multitudes. Finally, while witnessing dusk in the drives, one witnesses the turning point of day into night with all its implications of the ceaseless cycle of night and day, a cycle prerequisite of life itself, which becomes mind-boggling in its apparent endlessness.

---

[20] Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 238.

Arthur Kolat. Video Stills from *The Malibu Canyon Road Drive*, 2015

Hockney's overlay of Wagner's longing and striving music onto an infinite landscape personifies the landscape in a way that parallels the Romantic notion of art as an illumination of nature rather than as a reflection of it. In his book on Romantic theory, M.H. Abrams explains the shift in metaphors of mind that characterized the Romantic conception of art. Analyzing the poetry and theory of Coleridge and Wordsworth, Abrams writes that the "modifying action of passion, that of animating the inanimate—the transference of the life of the observer to the thing he observes—was eminently the preoccupation of romantic poets and theorists."[21] Romantic poetry did this, Abrams argues, by analogizing the mind of the poet "to something which is at once projective and capable of receiving back the fused product of what it gives and what is given to it."[22] Although the Wagner Drives do not explicitly invoke metaphors of the artist's mind as a lamp or a fountain, "projecting life, physiognomy, and passion into the universe," they nevertheless transfer a Wagnerian bearing onto the landscape, thereby animating inanimate nature.[23] By drawing this parallel I am not proposing that Hockney is a type of Romantic poet, but rather I wish to suggest that there is what Lovejoy calls an elective affinity between the mood or attitude of the Wagner Drives and a Romantic metaphor of mind. By the same logic, the affinities that bind the Wagner Drives to Romanticism are stronger than those that might tie them to modern or postmodern revisions or rejections of nature, the infinite, and the sublime that have characterized much of the theorizing from the 1960s onward. For this reason, it is an elusive feature of the drives that they nevertheless contain other affinities that connect them with the currents of modernism and postmodernism.

---

[21] M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 55.
[22] Ibid., 67.
[23] Ibid., 64.

Modernism: Motoring Days

If the period of Romanticism was roughly coterminous with the 1800s, it was just after the turn of the new century that the early modernist writer Marcel Proust set down a description of the aesthetics of automobile travel. Proust's essay ponders the special qualities of driving in terms of both music and visual art and prefigures the observations he would make about the perception of church steeples in a similar and more famous passage from his magnum opus, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In the shorter earlier article Proust gives an account of a trip through the Norman countryside, detailing what and how he saw from the car on the way to his parents' house near Lisieux. He notices the old houses rushing through his field of vision and the many characters that the church towers assume as they rise up from the horizon across the plains and draw nearer.

> Suddenly, like a veil that once kept something invisible but now unveils even the most intricate details, the towers of the Trinity came into view, or, rather, a single tower appeared behind which was concealed a second. When the first moved aside, the second stepped forward, and they lined up. Finally, a third, tardier, forceful steeple—Saint-Saveur, I suppose—joined the face off. In between the multiplying towers, the city, over the embankment now smiling with light, obedient to the towers' impetus but unable to soar to their heights, now developed the complex but

> honest fugue of its rooftops through the interplay of verticals and horizontals.[24]

Like the description of the three towers changing positions, much of Proust's account of his car trip is evocative of deep looking while driving. In a notable variation on this theme, after night has fallen on the world exterior to the car, Proust, turning to look at his chauffeur, imagines him as the artist who, through the application of a talent, has created the artwork of the car trip. As the driver holds the seemingly motionless steering wheel, Proust compares this image to the effigies of saints who hold the symbols of the "arts in which they excelled…"[25] At several points along the way, the visual experience brought into being by the driver-artist calls to Proust's mind a moment of musical comparison. The verticals and horizontals of the rooftops chasing one another conjure a fugue, which in turn etymologically connotes the movement of running and pursuit.

Significantly, Proust ends his recollections of the journey with a comparison to Wagner. Proust's logic is as follows: "the automobile's most precious gift of all was its admirable independence: the fact that it was free to depart whenever it pleased and to stop whenever so inclined."[26] Proust then links this freedom and control over one's travel to the act of fleeing some sorrow to arrive at some joy. For him the climactic moment of anticipation was sounding the car horn in the dark of night to announce his arrival to his unsuspecting parents. "And I dream," Proust concludes by saying,

> about *Tristan and Isolde*: how in the second act Isolde waves her scarf as a signal as well as in the third act with the arrival of the ship. In a seeming but quite brilliant abdication of his own creative control, Wagner entrusts the expression of the most prodigious anticipated joy that has ever filled the human heart, in the first case, to

---

[24] Marcel Proust, "Motoring Days (Impressions de route en automobile; 1907)," trans. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, in *Speed Limits* (Milan: Skira editore, 2009), 243.
[25] Ibid., 245.
[26] Ibid., 246.

> the indefinite and accelerating strident reprise of two notes whose sequence is sometimes random within the unorganized realm of noise; in the second case, to notes of increasing intensity, the insatiable monotony of a lean song, issuing from the pan-pipe of a humble shepherd."[27]

Proust thus equates the automobile's freedom of flight with a Wagnerian rendering of emotion—anticipated joy—and by so doing conflates the experiences of art and reality. After having his own remarkable experience of "anticipated joy" in reality, Proust marvels at how Wagner had musically embodied the same emotions in art. Wagner's ambition that the stage should become the universe finds its inverse in Proust's account. Here, in a sense, Proust's reality assumes the guise of opera.

The Indistinguishability of Art and Life

The blurring of art and reality in Hockney's Wagner Drives operates on the same principle of matching the qualities of car travel with those of Wagnerian drama that was evident in Proust's account. Hockney achieves this through a type of expanded operatic production, which locates the site of performance in the mobile theater of the car itself. The proscenium stage in Hockney's mise-en-scène is replaced by the mountains, the sea, and the sky; the stage lighting by the setting sun. Hockney's stage designs are vast preexisting landscapes, selected and then nominated by the artist as art. The notion that such an act can constitute art has a basis in the theories of Marcel Duchamp, who claimed that at the heart of the artistic gesture were varying degrees of choice. "Choice is the main thing," Duchamp claimed, "even in normal painting."[28] In the Wagner Drives, Hockney's choices of preexisting music and landscape are indeed the foundation of the experience, but his choices necessarily exist outside the framework of institutional display and validation, due to the radical scale of their expanded opera.

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1996), 162.

The boundaries between artwork and real life therefore become even more enmeshed. The mise-en-scène in the Wagner Drives is not wholly circumscribed, either spatially or temporally. The degree to which they are spatially circumscribed depends on the limits of an individual's field of vision; temporally, they remain ambiguous about definite beginnings and ends. Cresting the Santa Monica Mountains, for example, one can see for miles into the Pacific Ocean to the south, the San Fernando Valley to the north, and up and down the mountain ranges east to west. Thus the choice of preexisting landscape allows for a high degree of spatial flexibility with regard to its own boundaries, which are guided but not precisely defined by Hockney's selection of the routes.

Likewise, it is unclear when the landscape starts and ceases to function as part of the artwork. The sky's crepuscular atmosphere and the lapping of the Pacific waves, for example, are still perceptible after the music has finished. They are even the visual environment that Hockney was surrounded by at his beach house after the actual driving was done. Despite their indefinite beginnings and ends, the Wagner Drives nevertheless function by a kind of temporary nomination; that is, at some point the landscape stops operating as art and returns to being landscape. Following this line of reasoning it could be asked: if someone other than Hockney performed the drive now in the Santa Monica Mountains, using more or less the same routes that Hockney had and using more or less the same music, to what extent would it be Hockney's own expanded operatic mise-en-scène? My recent reperformances of the Malibu drives highlight this uncertainty. The degree to which Hockney's choices and choreography are present in my iteration of the drives remains an open question and serves to underscore the drives' fundamentally ambiguous nature.

The Wagner Drives additionally resist easy classification as art instead of life because they exist outside of institutional presentation and discourse. This issue is played out in the way that what I have been calling the Wagner Drives have been referred to over time. Indeed, these scant mentions in print are some of the only clues about the work's existence, without which the present study could never have begun. In 1993, an article appeared in the *New York Times* "Style" Section in which the journalist Trip Gabriel describes his ride with Hockney without mentioning the ride by any particular name. "With the ocean to the left and the red-tile roofs of Pepperdine University to the right, he [Hockney] shouted above the opening bars of 'America' from 'West Side Story': 'It's a piece of performance art!'"[29] The same year, Hockney published an autobiography in which he mentions the Wagner Drives in passing, "I began exploring the Santa Monica Mountains, playing Wagner, realizing how dramatic it could be and I actually choreographed two drives after that."[30] Later in the book, Hockney refers to "my Wagner drive," which is how the drives are listed in the 1990 entry of the "Illustrated Biography" section on Hockney's authorized website.[31] By contrast, the drives are absent from the website's "Chronology" section, which instead notes that in 1990 Hockney began "a series of oil paintings of the Santa Monica mountains."[32] Lawrence Weschler, dedicating three descriptive paragraphs in 1996 to a ride he had gone on with

---

[29] Gabriel, "At Home With/David Hockney"
[30] Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 180.
[31] Ibid., 191.
[32] David Hockney Authorized Website: www.hockneypictures.com
(*bio*: http://www.hockneypictures.com/illust_chronology/illust_chrono_07.php
chronology: http://www.hockneypictures.com/chronology_75_90.php), websites accessed March 2, 2016.

Hockney, called it "one of those 'Parsifal drives,'" which was later amended in the February 1997 issue of the *Los Angeles Magazine* to "one of those 'Wagner drives.'"[33] Weschler has more recently said of the drives that it was not his sense that "when I got in that car that he [Hockney] was saying, 'I'm going to give you privileged access to my newest work of art,'" preferring to characterize the drives as "of a piece with" and "bleeding into" all of Hockney's other artistic activity at the time.[34]

In addition to their mentions in print by Hockney and several of his passengers, another way of considering the status of the Wagner Drives is through their even rarer museum presentation, or more accurately, the inclusion in one recent exhibition of documentation of what I refer to as the San Gabriel Mountain Drive. In a certain sense, the dozen or so oil paintings of the Santa Monica Mountains, exhibited in New York City in the winter of 1990-1991, are the first of Hockney's works connected to what I refer to as the two Malibu Wagner Drives. These paintings, have titles like *Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica, The Cutting, Thrusting Rocks, The Valley, Mountain from Stunt Road,* and *The Red Mountain* (figures 10-15). While these paintings are valuable fragments of the original drives insofar as they reveal moments along the route that struck Hockney as particularly worthy of depiction, they are nevertheless at some remove from being documentation of a performance.

In 1993 one of Hockney's passengers filmed the second of the three Wagner Drives, what I refer to as the Kanen Dume Road Drive. This video belongs to Hockney's personal archive and has the unpolished feel of a home video, perhaps the kind of footage that might appear in a biographical movie about him, and has accordingly never been exhibited. Twenty-two years after the development of the original drives in Malibu, Hockney attached three cameras to a car that he drove through the San Gabriel Mountains and made a forty-four minute three-channel video called *The Wagner Drive (2012)*. This video was made as the blockbuster survey of Hockney's recent work, *A Bigger Picture*, traveled Europe, and was included in the exhibition's American version, *A Bigger Exhibition*, which was on view at the de Young Museum, San Francisco from October 2013 through January 2014.

---

[33] Lawrence Weschler, "Liebestod: A Final Tristan" in *True to Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 86. A version of this chapter appeared in the February 1997 *Los Angeles Times Magazine* under the title "The Colors of Silence."
[34] Lawrence Weschler, in conversation with the author, September 16, 2015.

Commenting on the filming of *The Wagner Drive* Hockney says, "I did it because two people had come here from Cologne [the last stop for *A Bigger Picture*]…and we finished one afternoon and I said to this guy who had never been to LA before, let me take you somewhere where nobody will take you in LA, up in the mountains. It's not far from here, we'll go and we'll have the music. And Jonathan put a little camera on the back of the car, just one at first, and we filmed it."[35] This led to an experiment with three cameras to make the picture wider and eventually Hockney decided to include the result in San Francisco. "Well, after I'd done those jugglers and these other things, I thought, well yes, you could show it there, in another room, I said so. I said, yes, we can put it in there. Might as well. Some people might sit through it, I don't know. Perhaps not anybody."[36] Hockney's reservation about a viewer's engagement with the three-channel video may come from his belief that video does not and cannot capture the real drive. On the other hand, Hockney characterizes the video's inclusion in the exhibition in somewhat tentative terms. This perhaps indicates a flux in his thinking about the status of this decades-old practice. I return to the issues of Wagner Drive documentation at more length in Chapter 4.

---

[35] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.
[36] Ibid.

Precedents in Postmodernist Ephemeral Art

One crucial way in which the more ephemeral art movements of the 1960s began challenging the collective intuition about what counts as art was their abolishment of the traditional requirement of skill. While this was achieved in a variety of ways, George Brecht's text-based scores provide an early case of the systematic displacement of skill in favor of a language-based refocusing of attention. In the words of Julia Robinson, Brecht's event scores from 1959-1962 aimed "to take momentary hold of the kind of attention we give to a work of art and to turn that attention to the details of everyday perceptual experience."[37] Robinson argues that Brecht's event scores were of central importance in the transition to conceptual art precisely because of their anticipation of the linguistic strategies that came to characterize the movement that would arise more formally in the latter half of the 1960s.

In *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)* (Spring/Summer 1960)—one of the early event scores—Brecht lays out instructions for a group of people of any size to come together at sundown in a open parking lot type area where they have all parked their cars. The performers receive a shuffled set of twenty-two cards, each with instructions as to the specific actions they are to carry out once they have gotten in their cars and started their engines. These actions include but are not limited to: turning on and off the windshield wipers, radio, various lights, turn signals; opening and closing the windows, doors, glove compartment, trunk lid, engine hood; accelerating the motor; honking the horn; etcetera. The duration and speed of each action are to be chosen by chance from a range, which is stipulated in parenthesis after each instruction. Lest the performance too closely resemble unbridled traffic cacophony, half of each forty-four card deck consists of "Pause" cards, which instruct the performer to pause for anywhere between one and thirteen counts. The performance ends when, "[h]aving acted on all instructions, each performer turns off the engine of his vehicle and remains seated until all vehicles have ceased running."[38]

---

[37] Julia Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht's Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s," *October* 172 (Winter 2009), 77.

Brecht's *Motor Vehicle Sundown* differs from Hockney's Wagner Drives in many basic attributes and concerns, starting from the traditions out of which the two works spring, including the wildly divergent actual experiences they produce, all the way through to questions of their possible afterlives. Nevertheless, their points of commonality start to sketch the contours of another genealogy into which the Wagner Drives might fit. This is especially true insofar as the Wagner Drives can be thought of as events, albeit events without scores, which makes the case that part of the late twentieth century's conceptual inheritance includes the survival of some aesthetic component, some actual event.

Brecht and Hockney diverge on the factors and traditions that precipitate the creation of their respective works involving performing with cars, however, they both locate the kernel of the unskilled events they choreograph in the coincidences of everyday experience. Brecht's event score, for example, was a reaction against the disciplinary boundaries of music composition at the time. The scores' development can be traced back to Brecht's studies of experimental composition with John Cage in the late 1950s. The art historian Seth Kim-Cohen has characterized Cage's course at the New School for Social Research in New York as being responsible for much of the "kind of conceptual, text-based work being produced everywhere and by everyone (or so it seemed) in New York in the early 1960s."[39] Brecht himself has said of the origin of his events that he had become, "increasingly dissatisfied with the emphasis of the purely aural qualities of a situation, so that by the Fall of 1959 I had decided to call my first show *Toward Events*…my thought being that the word 'event' was closer to the multi-sensory (total) experience I was interested in than any other."[40]

---

[38] George Brecht, *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event),* (1960). From the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Hockney, on the other hand, in the years leading up to the Wagner Drives was a successful mid-career painter, draughtsman, photographer, and theater designer, who, starting in 1986, had spent a year designing the sets for the Los Angeles Music Center's production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. He subsequently became interested in the alternative that Chinese hand scroll painting offered to the single-point perspective of the photographic image and began experimenting with commercially available photocopiers and fax machines as tools for picture-making. Nevertheless, there is a striking similarity between Brecht and Hockney both in their desire to dethrone the primacy of a dominant mode of artistic expression—for Brecht the aural experience of a composition, for Hockney the stasis of pictorial representation—and in the everydayness of the moment that brought about each artist's productive epiphany.

In recounting the germ of the idea for *Motor Vehicle Sundown*, Brecht writes, "In the Spring of 1960, standing in the woods in East Brunswick, New Jersey, where I lived at the time, waiting for my wife to come from the house, standing behind my English Ford station wagon, the motor running and the left-turn signal blinking, it occurred to me that a truly 'event' piece could be drawn from the situation. Three months later the first piece explicitly titled as an 'event' was finished, the *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*."[41] By comparison, Hockney's realization that music and landscape could match in some significant sense—one of the main premises of the Wagner Drives—had come to him in the early eighties during a car trip through the Mojave desert while listening to Handel's *Messiah*. By the end of the eighties Hockney was ensconced in his Malibu home and had upgraded the sound system in his convertible Mercedes to a then state-of-the-art ten disc CD changer, which would allow him real-time control over the precise musical selections in a way that had been previously unavailable to him. Driving around in the mountains and timing operatic excerpts to lengths of roadway, Hockney conceived an artwork that not only married the visual with the audio, but radically upended the traditionally still encounter of a viewer with an artwork.

---

[39] Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 55.

[40] George Brecht, "The Origin of Events." *Happening & Fluxus,* unnumbered. Cologne: Köelnischen Kunstverein (1970).

For how dissimilar the actual experience of the two works must be (having myself never performed or witnessed *Motor Vehicle Sundown*, I must only imagine) they both operate conceptually on the following fronts: First, they both shift the role of the artist away from object-maker and toward orchestrator of an ephemeral and immaterial experience. The corollary to this is that the location of art in both artworks consists in a relationship that is not physically manifest. Second, they both aim to train the perceptual attention paid to art on aspects of quotidian experience—the left-hand turn signal, listening to music while driving. Third, and related, they both sever the artwork's reliance on the skill of traditional studio practice, allowing the possibility that the untrained or non-specialist person could iterate the work. In Hockney's case, because there is no score or set of instructions, I am the only person to my knowledge who has collected the information necessary to perform a Wagner Drive, which I was able to do after a bit of practice. Fourth, both *Motor Vehicle Sundown* and the Wagner Drives incorporate elements of chance into the work. In the case of *Motor Vehicle Sundown*, the chance is a planned part of the work—the shuffling of cards and the deliberate ambiguity of the speed and duration of actions. In the Wagner Drives, chance appears by chance in the form of traffic on the road and atmospheric conditions determined by weather. Examples of this in my Wagner Drive reperformance videos are visible in the unromantic form of a jogger here and a cyclist there, or even a row of garbage bins lined up for trash collection. Fifth, and finally, both artworks aspire to destabilize the dominant mode of perception in their respective traditions while maintaining what Brecht calls the "multi-sensory (total) experience" or as Hockney puts it in reference to the drives, the "four-dimensional experience."[42] In the end, these characteristics necessitate the utilization of a similar type of semantic representation in which meaning is generated through non-pictorial means.

---

[41] Brecht, "The Origin of Events."

Importantly, neither *Motor Vehicle Sundown* on the one side of Conceptual Art with a capital C, nor the Wagner Drives on the other, relinquishes aesthetic concerns or perceptual experience to the austerity of the purely linguistic-cognitive. Firsthand experience of these works still proves to be an appropriate way to engage with and appreciate them, which is why reperformance is such a prevalent aspect of Fluxus events. In *Motor Vehicle Sundown*, the dematerialization of the art object, had not yet fully embraced the emphasis on "concepts, *expressly* at the expense of other aesthetic aspects," that the move to text-based works helps inaugurate for Conceptual Art.[43] Brecht's work straddles this line. *Drip Music (Drip Event) (1959-1962)*, for example, is a score whose instruction is simply to drip water into an empty vessel. The aestheticization of dripping water, which is to say the aesthetic aspect of the piece, has not been obliterated or overshadowed by concept. By focusing "on the sensual effects to be discovered in the simple act" of dripping water, the audience gains something that merely reading the score refuses to provide.[44]

---

[42] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

On the other hand, for works like *Word Event* (1961), whose instruction is nothing but the single word "exit," it is a harder case to make that language, and the ideas it conveys, has not completely overtaken the importance of aesthetic values. By the time of works such as Robert Barry's *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking* (1969) aesthetic value has been wiped away, displaced through language by the concept at the work's core, thus rendering first-hand experience virtually meaningless. To take the Wagner Drives as one answer to the question of how the impact and legacy of sixties conceptualism is felt at the turn of the nineties, would be to ask the question in a different way: to what extent was conceptual art's devaluation of the aesthetic component of art an unsustainable strategy? To what extent is the austerity of concept-to-the-exclusion-of-all-else practicable in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries without relapse into nostalgia for High Conceptualism?

At the end of 1966, in the now legendary story of his nighttime car ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike, sculptor Tony Smith was able to pinpoint the tension between the powerful aesthetic value of non-art activities and the growing notion that art might be undergoing a divestiture from its object-based clothing. In an interview with Samuel Wagstaff, Jr. for *Artforum*, Smith recounts his epiphany:

---

[43] Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear*, 52, (emphasis in original).
[44] Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 77.

> When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get on to the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.
>
> The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe — abandoned works, Surrealist landscapes, something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscape without cultural precedent began to dawn on me. There is a drill ground in Nuremberg, large enough to accommodate two million men. The entire field is enclosed with high embankments and towers. The concrete approach is three sixteen-inch steps, one above the other, stretching for a mile or so.[45]

Though he avoids calling the experience he had art, Tony Smith's revelation from driving on the turnpike resembles Brecht's revelation while waiting for his wife. At a certain hour, under conditions provided haphazardly by the confluence of the natural and the artificial elements of the environment—car, sunset, hills, colored lights, etcetera—a particular aesthetic potential was revealed. This predates Hockney's own realization in the Nevada desert and indeed the language he uses to describe the Wagner Drives' resistance to being filmed echoes Smith's statement about the limits of pictorial framing.

---

[45] Tony Smith and Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* (December 1966), 19.

Smith's anecdote, along with his work and the work of Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris, was famously called on the carpet in 1967 on charges of theatricality by the art critic Michael Fried. But in the process of spelling out how antithetical theatricality was to art, Fried inventoried the qualities and values of Minimalism—what he called literalism—which have since become paradigmatic in art practice. As Kim-Cohen writes, Fried's essay "is one of the most astute pieces of art criticism ever published…Confronted with a set of four mirrored cubes on a gallery floor, Fried predicts the advent of modes of practice that will come to be called conceptual art, performance, body art, video, even social practice."[46]

Fried was staunchly against the tendency toward these modes of practice, but his analysis proves useful in terms of historicizing the Wagner Drives in their post-conceptual moment. Fried's notion of theatricality, as applied in "Art and Objecthood" to Minimalism, is that "the work and installation…solicited and included the beholder…"[47] For Fried this waged war upon the antitheatricalily of modernist painting and sculpture, which he saw as refusing to address itself to the viewer. The less theatrical the artwork, the more likely it would be able to triumph over its own objecthood, that is, its tendency toward being or resembling or acting like a mere non-art object. According to Fried, one plank in the theatricality platform is the condition of an artwork to treat its relation to its surroundings as a mise-en scène. The work becomes, at heart, an object in a situation with the viewer. Fried quotes Robert Morris on this particular notion: "'But the concerns now are for more control of…the entire situation.'…It is, I think, worth remarking that 'the entire situation' means exactly that: *all* of it—including, it seems, the beholder's *body*. There is nothing within his field of vision—nothing that he takes note of in any way—that declares its irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience in question. On the contrary, for something to be perceived at all is for it to be perceived as part of that situation. Everything counts…"[48]

---

[46] Seth Kim-Cohen, *Against Ambience* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), PDF e-book, chap. 4.
[47] Michael Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 41, (emphasis in original).

Fried is talking about Minimalist sculpture here, but according to his reading it is also applicable to Smith's turnpike experience even though it involved no actual object. The experience of the turnpike and the experience of four mirrored cubes on the floor both share the everything-counts ethos. Moreover, they share the temporal dimension that the Minimalist "work-in-situation" implies.[49] Again, Fried quotes Morris, "Similarly Morris's claim that in the best new work the beholder is made aware that 'he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context' amounts to the claim that the beholder is made aware of the endlessness and inexhaustibility if not of the object itself at any rate of his experience of it."[50]

Another characteristic Fried sees as a degraded part of both Minimalist sculpture and the drive on the turnpike is the fact that they are both "wholly accessible to everyone."[51] Fried cites favorable comments that Smith made about the universal comprehensibility of Le Corbusier's Chandigarh court building in order to cast Smith as eager for an art that everyone understands. This is distinct in Fried's mind from modernist painting and sculpture in which the questions of whether and what one has understood are always open to dispute.

---

[48] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155, (emphasis in original).
[49] Fried, "Introduction," 41.
[50] Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 166.
[51] Ibid., 158.

In its situational site-specificity, its everything-counts ethos, its duration and inexhaustibility, and its universal comprehensibility, Tony Smith's drive—and all Minimalist sculpture, for that matter—resemble the Wagner Drives. On this last point of the availability of the artwork to the perceiver, Hockney notes just how little knowledge the Wagner Drive passengers need of Wagnerian plot twists and musical development: "I took two kids on it once, and they said oh it's like a movie. They wouldn't have listened to this music just sitting at home. But in a car, where you're hearing and seeing, and if you get it to match, people know it."[52] While nature in its romantic infinity may defy human attempts to comprehend, the pairing of music and landscape in Hockney's postmodernist cinema remains legible to the contemporary passenger. In addition to comprehensibility, inexhaustibility figures prominently in the Wagner Drives: apprehending the landscape from the fluid perspective of a car driving through it, the passenger's relationship to the object will never be exhausted. And in the end, each passenger can be sure of the relevance of his or her experience.

Concerns of Constructed Situations in Contemporary Art

The fact that the Wagner Drives exist outside the typical strategies of performance art documentation casts them as a forerunner to art practice that explicitly problematizes this issue. As regards both documentation and the related topic of performance execution, several parallels are to be found, for example, between the Wagner Drives and the constructed situations of the performance artist Tino Sehgal. In pieces like *This Progress* (2010) at the Guggenheim, *These Associations* (2012) at the Tate Modern, and

---

[52] Hockney, in conversation with the author, January 9, 2015.

This Situation (2013) at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal, Sehgal designs a set of rules to be followed by a group of auditioned and cast interpreters with the goal of creating person-to-person interactions within the museum context. Lauren Collins, writing in the New Yorker, characterizes *These Associations* as perhaps "best thought of as interrogative art, a series of stylized dialogues that cut through the niceties of social interaction, prompting a concentrated exchange of thoughts."[53] In order to structure the conversations that form the encounters in *These Associations*, Sehgal rehearsed a set of four prompts with the interpreters that "required the talkers to discuss moments when they had experienced either a sense of arrival, a sense of belonging, a sense of satisfaction, or a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves."[54] These scripted moments form the basis of the interactions which constitute the work. Crucial to Sehgal's conception, however, is that the piece leave no material trace. This means no actual script or score for future performers to follow, no written contract between the artist and the museum, and no written or photographic documentation of the event in the museum or gallery. Furthermore, Sehgal does not disclose the rules of interaction to the museum's visitors. Thus his pieces rely for part of their conceptual heft both on their radical ephemerality and the veiled nature of the artist's agency in the piece's creation.

Two qualities follow logically from this framework: First, Sehgal's pieces approach immateriality. They are devoid of the material trappings that would signal their status as artworks, preserve them in museum archives, and allow them to circulate in any way other than through written commentary or interpersonal training. Second, the structure of the pieces is open. A museum visitor might go into a situation designed by Sehgal alert to the fact that certain moments and interactions are scripted yet remain unaware of exactly which ones are and to what degree. This, in turn, raises questions about the necessity of artist supervision, particularly what counts as the artwork and what counts as the frame for the artwork.

---

[53] Lauren Collins, "The Question Artist," *New Yorker*, August 6, 2012.
[54] Ibid.

In contrast to Sehgal's insistence on immateriality and accompanying reliance on the institution as frame, Hockney has never been adamant about the drives leaving no material trace nor has he been preoccupied with their institutional framing. The Wagner Drives are either unconcerned about or unsuitable for their manifestation in the form of instructions, photos, and videos, but apparently not through any interdiction on the part of their creator. It is this radical ephemerality that the drives inaugurate in the nineties, which is taken up more strictly by Sehgal in the following century. But whereas the constructed situation of a Wagner Drive does not depend on any institutional framework for its status, Sehgal has couched his situations in the saleable terms of museum performance and acquisition. This brands Sehgal's pieces unequivocally as performance art.

The Wagner Drives, on the other hand, do not exist in museums, cannot be bought or sold, and have no admission ticket associated with them. In this sense they are less recognizable as performance art and less generative of economic value. By participating in the commodity culture of the artwork, Sehgal explicitly attaches value to the situations that his works create, despite the absence of material documentation. This is a deliberate effort on Sehgal's part to elevate personal interaction from a marginal art to one of high status. The Wagner Drives, on the other hand, by remaining outside of the museum, embrace the value inherent in their situation without the need of market validation. Moreover, they create a type of value within a structured situation that is not transmissible to the museum but that nevertheless predates the intimacy and interaction of Sehgal's stylized choreographies.

Sehgal's situations bear a structural resemblance to the Wagner Drives as well, in that both types of artwork trigger interactions between the performer and the audience that are designed around specific moments in the larger open-ended fabric of the work. Furthermore, in neither type of work is the audience entirely privy to what the artist has planned versus what occurs through serendipity. In the Wagner Drives these moments of planning are at some points very specifically articulated and at others the product of the larger conceit. In Sehgal's work this is the difference between a clearly scripted question like "What is progress?" at the beginning of *This is Progress* and the partially organic conversation that follows. The question of what in the experience is explicitly choreographed by the artist directly affects the performance's afterlife because it highlights the uncertain degree of artist supervision that the piece's performance requires. My performances of the Wagner Drives depended on direct conversations with Hockney but it is unclear what relation a Wagner Drive a hundred years from now might have to the original, in the same way it is unclear what relation a staged conversation with a stranger about progress might have to Sehgal's piece.

The Wagner Drives' Place in Art History

Throughout this chapter I have proposed a number of parallels between the Wagner Drives and moments of artistic practice from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. To be clear, I do not see these parallels as equivalencies. Indeed, in most cases, the comparison itself shows just how distinct the Wagner Drives are as a practice from any single set of prevailing historical concerns from Romanticism through contemporary performance art. Drawing such parallels means that the Wagner Drives not only resonate with historical practices, but that they exist in tension with them. It is therefore quite a difficult task to adjudicate where to classify the Wagner Drives in the scheme of late twentieth-century art history.

Creating neologisms to describe the Wagner Drives serves to illustrate just how far away they are from the nearest star in the galaxy of potentially related practices. I have compared the drives to both Romanticism and Fluxus events, but what would it mean if I suggested that the drives should be classified as Participatory Romanticism? The new term would have to indicate a coherent set of practices, with its own history, to which the Wagner Drives would belong. I am not convinced that such a history exists. Likewise, I have couched the Wagner Drives in terms of an expanded operatic staging, but to designate them as Postmodern Operatic Performance Art would mean labeling them so that they fit within an identifiable set of practices. Again, I am not certain this history actually exists.

Rather than defending the Wagner Drives as a part of a unified neologized genealogy, I instead propose that they operate under the influence of ideas from disparate moments: the fusion of arts in Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk, the engagement with nature of Romanticism, the modernity of automobile perception, the Duchampian nomination of preexisting objects, the particularized aesthetic experience of Fluxus events, the proximity to non-art of Tony Smith and Minimalism, and the resistance to documentation and problems of iteration of Tino Sehgal's constructed situations. More than merely operating under a disparate set of influences, the Wagner Drives are also innovative in their radical use of space, their insouciance toward documentation and museum presentation, and their expansion of the medium of operatic production. It is true that both Proust and Smith were affected by their perceptions of space from the moving car, but in their cases the aesthetic feeling was the byproduct of isolated experiences, rather than a careful choreography. It is also true that Sehgal has foregrounded the immateriality of performance art through his hostility to documentation, creating situations with specific prompts but an overall open architecture. Though Hockney is neither hostile to documentation nor aesthetically similar to Sehgal, the Wagner Drives are nevertheless constructed situations from the 1990s, which arrange specific moments in an open architecture, question their ability to be documented, and complicate their material presence within the museum.

These parallels provide ways of understanding one or another set of issues at play in the Wagner Dries while at the same time leading to difficult and open questions of historical priority and precedence in the histories of modernism and postmodernism. For these reasons, the Wagner Drives remain an intriguing example of late twentieth-century artistic experimentation.

Chapter 4

Responding to The Wagner Drives: Documentation, Study, and Reperformance

Art historian Amelia Jones starts her essay "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation" by enumerating performance art pieces from the 1960s and 70s that she was too young to have experienced in any way other than through their documentation. She goes on to argue that "the specificity of knowledges gained from participating in a live performance situation…should not be privileged over the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces."[1] I share Jones's position with regard to the original decade of the Wagner Drives. I was eight years old when Hockney started these performances and eleven years old when Trip Gabriel wrote about them for the *New York Times*. Compounding the problem of gaining a specificity of knowledge through documentation, however, is the fact that the drives are a performance for a very small audience of potential documentarians, one that can fit in a car. This makes written accounts like Gabriel's tantalizing in its offering of some details but ultimate failure to satisfy curiosity. Additionally, it is unclear what photographs—performance art's archetypal indexical document—were taken by passengers in the nineties, if indeed any were.

The one exception to this is a video recording taken by a passenger of the Kanen Dume Road Drive in 1993 in which the cameraman, Bing McGilvray, expresses his doubts to Hockney about whether the camera will satisfactorily register the music. This suggests an impulse to preserve the performance and perhaps to turn it into a presentable document, but ultimately that video was relegated to Hockney's personal archive, along with videos of other car trips, birthday parties, and presumably many other of the events of Hockney's quotidian life. Apart from this video, the instructions for performance of the drives remained in their performer's memory and the details of the experience in the memories of his passengers. This was the case until the summer of 2012, when Hockney decided to create a three-channel video of the San Gabriel Mountain Drive, which he then put on display for visitors to *A Bigger Exhibition*.

---

[1] Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter, 1997), 12.

I agree with Amelia Jones in her challenge to the ontological priority of being present at a live performance. In beginning to study the Wagner Drives, I approached them as Jones approaches her subjects, "through their photographic, textual, oral, video, and/or film traces."[2] But as Jones herself acknowledges, one of the many logistical problems with this approach is "obtaining the documentation that's available."[3] I collected the descriptions I could find of the Wagner Drives in print and made contact with one of their authors, Lawrence Weschler, to speak with him about his recollections. Weschler, in turn, put me in contact with Hockney so that I might obtain more traces of the drives. In the course of my conversations with Hockney, two things became apparent: first, that there were detailed ways of documenting these performances that had not yet been explored, and second, that being present for a performance would indeed allow me to gain a valuable specificity of knowledge about this particular work.

The Wagner Drive documentation that I had access to before speaking directly with Hockney were brief descriptions in print, a single viewing of the 2012 video in the context of a museum exhibition, and a series of landscape paintings Hockney had done of the Santa Monica Mountains in the early nineties. These fragments almost belong in the category of performance documentation that the performance scholar Philip Auslander terms "the *documentary*."[4] This category "represents the traditional way in which the relationship between performance art and its documentation is conceived. It is assumed that the documentation of the performance event provides both a record of it through which it can be reconstructed…and evidence that it actually occurred."[5] The Wagner Drive documentation does not quite fit this category because the documents of the drives do not meaningfully allow for their reconstruction, either in the historical sense of determining what occurred in them or in the performative sense of iterating a version of them. It is true that certain roads and musical selections are mentioned in written descriptions of the Malibu drives, and that the San Gabriel Mountain soundtrack is identifiable from the 2012 video. However, in the process of obtaining what documentation I could from Hockney, I saw the opportunity not just to gather but to create the documentation I was missing.

---

[2] Ibid., 11.

[3] Ibid., 12

Hockney took me on the San Gabriel Mountain Drive on the premise that if I was interested in studying the drives, I should go on one. I recorded the route that we drove on a mobile phone tracking application. In order to record the directions for the two Malibu versions, I presented Hockney with a Thomas Guide atlas of street maps and we sketched out the originals routes. With the maps and playlists in hand, I spent a week in Malibu rehearsing and performing the drives to see if I could achieve a viable approximation. I filmed three separate performances of the Malibu Canyon Road Drive with a camera attached to the car's windshield in three different positions. My partner during these reperformances was the photographer Ange Wong, who documented moments from the drives through still photography. Our efforts resulted in a small exhibition of our work at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Gallery X. The exhibition was part documentation and part artistic response to our experience of Wagner Drives through reperformance.

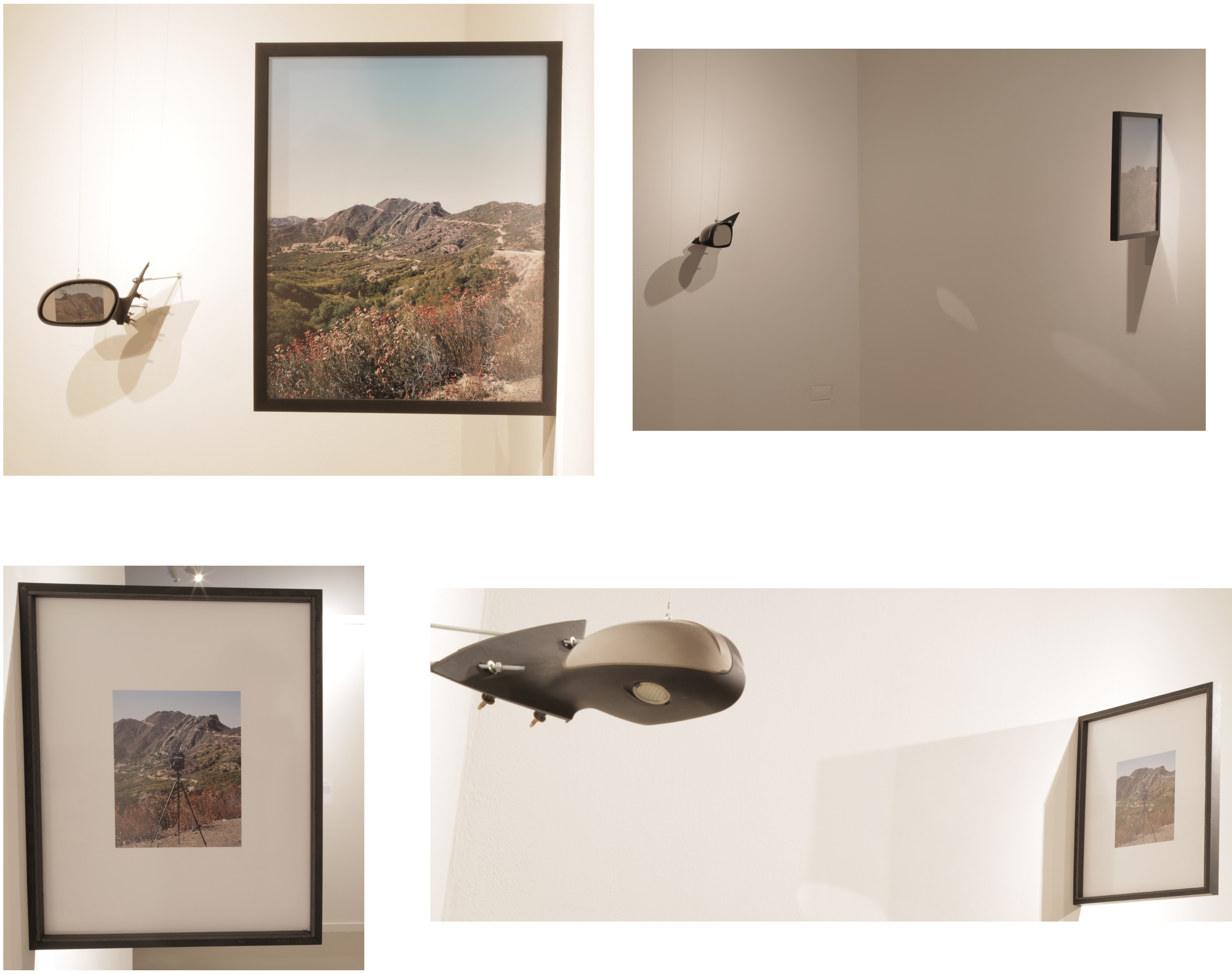
---

[4] Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: The Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 28, no. 3 (Sept., 2006), 10.
[5] Ibid.

Stunt Road: An Exhibition After Hockney

In the course of my involvement with the Wagner Drives, I moved from questions typical of performance art historiography, to questions of my role in the production of documents. With the documents in hand, I sought not only to reconstruct the central issues of the work in my mind, but to revive the production, as it were. It seemed to me like a very reasonable thing to do. I had acquired the necessary information, why not see if I could execute it myself? How could I fail to enhance my relationship to the artwork in the process? It was an experiment that Ange Wong and I happily embarked on and what we learned from the experience took on an artistic life of its own. This is the nature of experimentation.

For our gallery presentation of this experiment, Wong conceived a photo-sculpture work comprised of a photographic diptych and the side view mirror of a car. During our rehearsals of the Kanen Dume Road Drive, one of the landmarks we found was a mountain visible from Stunt Road, which Hockney had painted in 1990 (figure 14). Wong photographed this mountain in two different compositions. The first was an unobstructed view of the mountain taken with a large format camera and the second was a picture of the camera on its tripod trained at the mountain in the distance. The photographs were framed back-to-back in a double-sided frame, which was then installed such that the faces of the images met the wall at right angles. On the adjoining wall we installed the driver's-side mirror, adjusted to reflect the photo of the camera to a viewer positioned in front of the image of the mountain.



Installation views of Ange Wong's *After David Hockney,* 2015, from the exhibition *Stunt Road*

This piece, entitled, *After David Hockney's "Mountain From Stunt Road, 1990,"* (2015), configures a series of relationships that engages the viewer in the perceptual, representational, and performative issues at the heart of the Wagner Drives. From a perceptual standpoint, Wong's installation engages three types of looking while driving: alternating perception, double perception, and gradually shifting perception. Because of its perpendicular position to the wall, the diptych prevents viewing both of its sides simultaneously. Looking at one side of the picture frame necessarily precludes looking at its reverse. To see each of the diptych's two faces one must physically travel around the frame protruding from the wall. The frame's perpendicular installation thus enacts in miniature, the type of perceptual alternation that is at play in driving through the Santa Monica Mountains. From one side of the mountain the ocean is visible. From the other side, ocean is obscured in favor of the canyon's interior.

The addition of the car mirror to the diptych furnishes Wong's installation with both the double and shifting modes of perception that are also present in the drives. Though impossible to view both sides of the diptych at once, the mirror's alignment allows for the two photos to be juxtaposed through the reflection of the second image. Juxtaposition through reflection happens in the car as well, where landscapes from behind are juxtaposed with those in front. Moreover, Wong's mirror reflects a gradually shifting image, one that is dependent on the position and movement of the viewer. Unlike a car, however, in the gallery the mirror is frozen into position, prompting the gallery visitor to tilt and sway her head and ultimately inviting her to examine the back of the frame.

In addition to foregrounding the perceptual displacements of looking at the world from a moving car, Wong's piece is a meditation on the nature of representing the practice of art driving. For example, the photograph of the unobstructed mountain, prominently seen upon first approach, is deeply ambiguous about what it depicts. In one sense, it is the photographic document of a mountain that Hockney painted in 1990. In this capacity it serves as verification that the painting describes a real place and as a reference point against which to assess the painting's representation. In another sense, the photo is the document of a car trip, more precisely the document of a reperformance of a car trip, which itself is a document of the original performance. The unobstructed mountain is also one half of a diptych, in which it depicts the result of its partner image. Alternatively, if the mirror's reflected image is construed as the third element in a triptych, the photo of the mountain then becomes the least mediated image in the "mountain-camera-mirror" chain. In this sense, the mountain photograph is not only a depiction of a landscape, but also a self-conscious depiction of the problem of depiction.

Similar questions about the nature of depiction arise with regard to the image of the camera. It is in one case the documentation of documentation of a Wagner Drive reperformance, which confers performativity on the very process of reperformance documentation. In another case it is a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the limits of landscape photography to sufficiently capture landscape driving. The explicitness of the camera within the image also gestures toward Hockney's use of painting rather than photography to excise and preserve selected moments of a continuous drive. In every case the image of the camera functions in the larger whole as the pivotal link in a chain, each of whose links contains progressive degrees of mediation. From the mountain to the camera to the mirror, the progression reveals its own apparatuses of image-making. At the end of the chain the viewer sees a mirror reflecting a photograph of a camera photographing a mountain.

Construed as a loop rather than a chain, Wong's installation acts performatively: it is not so much a description of a drive along Stunt Road in Southern California as it is its own performance of a route through the gallery space. Furthermore, the route enacted in the space of installation performatively documents the act of documentation. The philosopher J.L. Austin proposes that certain utterances are by nature performative, a denomination that "indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something."[6] He differentiates performatives from what he calls constatives by recognizing that the former "do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'…"[7] By applying this linguistic concept to Wong's installation I am suggesting that the work is not merely documentary but enacts a physical route in its relations to the viewer as well as a conceptual route through its stages of mediation.

The route of the piece is as follows: looking at the piece while approaching it, one sees both the mountain and the mirror, the least and most mediated images of the actual mountain, respectively. When walking toward the piece from the entrance of the gallery, the reflected image of the diptych's reverse darts in and out of view in the mirror. This invites the viewer to walk around the diptych to examine its second image. In looking at this second image of the camera, one's view of the mirror is eclipsed. This sets up an asymmetry: looking at the mirror includes the image of the camera but looking at the camera the mirror disappears from view. This is a bend in the road, as it were, where the choice to turn leaves one view behind in favor of another. The image of the camera shows an event on the cusp of realization, the exposure of a landscape photograph. By walking back to the diptych's first image, one can see the product of this photographic process, but in so doing the mirror and its reflection of the camera reappear, preventing any illusion of immediacy that the photographed mountain landscape might have had.

---

[6] J.L Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, original lectures given at Harvard in 1955), 6-7.
[7] Ibid., 5.

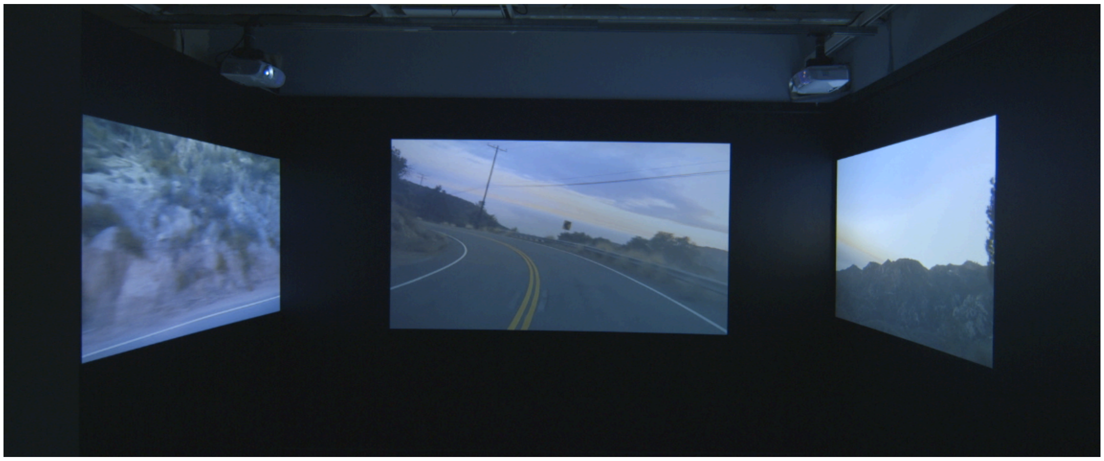
Along this circular route, the zone between the mirror and the photograph of the camera creates a richly layered space. As the mirror stares straight at the back of the camera, it produces a series of interposed elements along a spectrum. At one end is the mirror's surface itself, in which is reflected the image of the mountain with the camera in front. In the mirror's reflection the image of the mountain is projected onto the camera's ground glass in the direction of the actual photograph. In the photograph itself, likewise, the mountain's image is projected onto the ground glass in the opposite direction, the direction of the ground glass's mirrored image. Adding to the complexity of layering along this stretch between mirror and photo is the implied position of a second camera, somewhere in between, which was necessary to take the photo of the camera. This also places the negative on the plate in the large format camera—i.e. the negative of the diptych's frontal image—within the layered spectrum, both as a photo and as a reflection. These points along the spectrum of the installation's route are not discrete. Rather they fuse together into a circuit of documentation and performance.

This performativity is compounded by the installation's documentation of performance art documentation. The photographs document not only a process of reperformance of Hockney's Wagner Drives, but the process of documenting that process. Auslander argues that "performance documents are not analogous to [Austin's] constatives, but to performatives: in other words, *the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such.* Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance…"[8] By this logic, the documents in Wong's *After David Hockney* produce the event of two people engaged in performance art documentation as its own autonomous piece of performance art.

Across the gallery from Wong's installation, on three walls that form the shape of a square bracket, I projected my three channel video piece, *The Malibu Canyon Road Drive* (2015). Born out of a desire to document and study my reperformances, the videos, in their editing and installation, move beyond purely documentary concerns to foreground aspects of the drives that Hockney himself has not highlighted in his work. Across the three videos in my piece, I present a wide field of vision by positioning the camera squarely to the left and right for the side channel videos and straight ahead for the center channel. This mimics the passing scenery that one might see by looking out of the car's left, right, and center windows. I accentuate this mimicry in the gallery by making the center projection larger than those on the two sidewalls. Each of the videos was shot at the same hour, driving the same route, but on three separate evenings. The videos thus incorporate a longer expanse of time than one drive alone would and prevent perfect synchronicity between the three channels.

---

[8] Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," 5 (emphasis in original).



Installation view of Arthur Kolat's *The Malibu Canyon Road Drive,* 2015, from the exhibition *Stunt Road*

The three videos start with a moment of synchronicity and gradually slip out of phase with each other. This produces a variety of temporal, spatial, and musical displacements. I edited the three videos so that the first turn of the drive, from the Pacific Coast Highway to Malibu Canyon Road, happens at the same moment in all three videos. Once on Malibu Canyon Road, the two side channels begin to fall behind the center. The time lag that this produces is most noticeable when the center channel goes into a tunnel, followed around ten to fifteen seconds later by the left channel, which is followed slightly later by the right. The mountains the viewer sees in the center channel upon exiting the tunnel are therefore not the same stretches of mountain seen simultaneously in the right channel. Of course, the mountains on the right are the same mountain range along Malibu Canyon Road, and indeed, they are the same stretches of mountain seen in the center channel just a few moments earlier. In this way the video allows the viewer the temporal dislocation of seeing where the car is going in the center channel and where the car has been on the left and right. This temporal disjunction is intensified by the fact that each filmed drive occurred on a different day, the center channel having happened chronologically first.

The temporal disjunction is also a spatial one. As the center channel turns from Malibu Canyon Road onto Piuma Road, one channel starts to head east as the other two channels remain for a brief time heading north. Piuma Road is a switchback that climbs up the mountain by alternating its direction roughly between east and west. The east and west stretches of the road are connected by hairpin turns, the rounding of which from east to west places the car heading directly into the glaring afternoon sunset. At certain moments in the video piece the ascent of Piuma Road can be spatially disorienting. The sun, for example, appears at times in more than one channel at once. Because the camera is fixed in position, the curvature of the winding roads can drastically rotate the landscape, adding to the disorientation. The spatial disorientation, however, is only partial; the three channels never fail to present a coherent landscape. The sun, though it dances in different directions on the winding roads, finds its position relative to the larger picture when the direction of the road stabilizes for long enough. Like the sun, glimpses of the Santa Monica Bay in the three channels serve as markers of orientation and disorientation alike, in one channel a destination and in another a point of past departure.

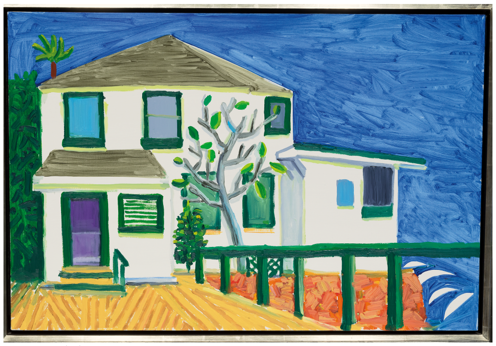
The spatial and temporal displacements that my video piece introduces into a consideration of Hockney's Wagner Drives bear on the question of matching music to landscape upon which the original drives rely. That is, the Wagnerian soundtrack that I have added to my videos differs from Hockney's conception in that one musical moment now overlays three distinct moments of landscape. This attests to the two types of superimposition that I argue are at play in the drives. One is a broad type of matching, the matching of a musical mood to the physical passage though a region at a general time of day. The drive up Piuma Road in my videos is an example of this. Not every note, or even every crescendo, can match meaningfully with a particular bend in the road. The general superimposition of *Parsifal*'s Prelude onto the sun-drenched valleys off Piuma Road matches to the extent that an immersive experience of the musical world resonates with immersion in a particular landscape. If the matching in the videos works, despite the videos showing three distinct moments along the path, it does so on the principle of general superimposition. The other mode of superimposition, where specific musical moments are timed to particular visual moments, succeeds in my videos only to the extent that those dramatic musical turning points are accompanied by a coherent coincidence of visual disjunctions. These specific superimpositions were the basis around which I began the video editing process. The Entry of the Gods into Valhalla, after all, must come at the entry of the car into the mountains.

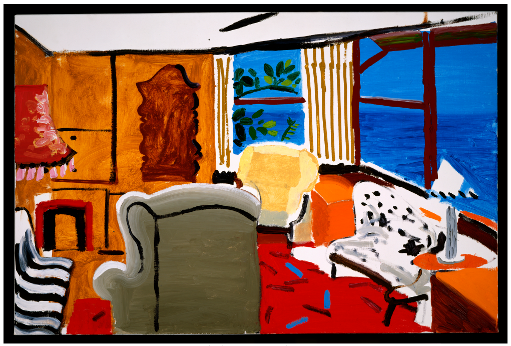
An Imaginary Wagner Drive

My ways of responding the Wagner Drives have developed over the course of this study. In 2014, before I had made contact with Hockney, I produced a written description of a Wagner Drive that had never actually taken place. This account was an attempt to creatively imagine the experience of a Wagner Drive based on the tangential information I had available to me at the time. The imaginary Wagner Drive was my first endeavor not only to reconstruct Hockney's practice of driving in the mountains, but also to react to a piece that I would later have the opportunity to explore in greater depth. It marks the beginning of an experimental investigation of which these pages are the culmination.

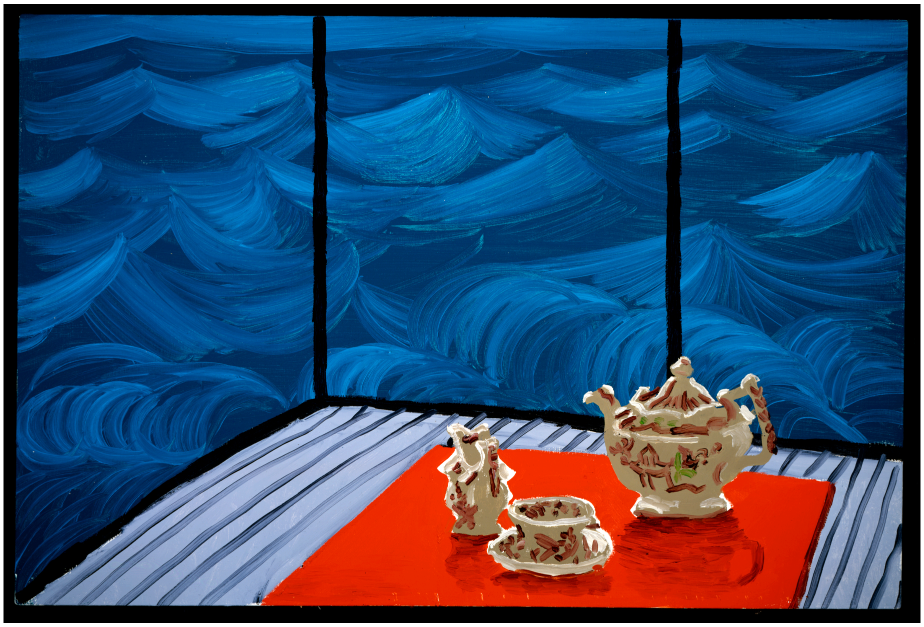
The story has to start at a single fixed point even if it is a story about movement. It could start chronologically, with seventeenth century Chinese landscape scrolls, and move forward, in a linear fashion, through the Wagnerian nineteenth century, up and down the vicissitudes of automotive and music-recording technologies, straight through to the present moment. The story could start with the *Vorspiel* and finish with the final curtain, moving forward in time, note by note, mysterious motive by ineffable chord. This story of movement could jump around, darting back and forth, like the saccades of the human eye. Or it might gallop or glide through space, crescendoing and falling away. In the end, everything relates back to movement: music is reducible to vibration, light conditions to moving particles. Space needs movement to measure it. Time itself is ceaselessly ticking. Perception requires a beating heart; to be truly motionless would be to die.

Or to put it slightly differently, the story has to start at a single fixed point, even if it is a story about duration. One work of art—Wagner's *Ring*—which takes a week to experience. The story is not a photograph, stuck, motionless, frozen in time. It is about the chemistry of bodies traveling through space, their fleeting alignment along tortuous roads, a car going up and the sun going down.


1 *Malibu House*, 1988


2 *Livingroom at Malibu With View*, 1988

Here is actually where the story starts, where the sky meets the waves in Malibu, California, at the beach house of David Hockney. This is how it looked in 1988, on the left the sun-drenched facade and on the right the living room with a view.



3 *Breakfast at Malibu, Sunday*, 1989

Sitting at the table on a Sunday morning in 1989 it is apparent the visual luxury that surrounds us. The waves of the Pacific Ocean slosh and crest, lapping lambently, outside the glass windows. To look at the light sparkle on the Pacific, I am reminded of a passage from John Dewey, who writes of "the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals…he is fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it."[9] So too is the Pacific Ocean a dramatic ecosystem in flux. On this bright Sunday the play of light on its surface is mesmerizing; one might even get lost.

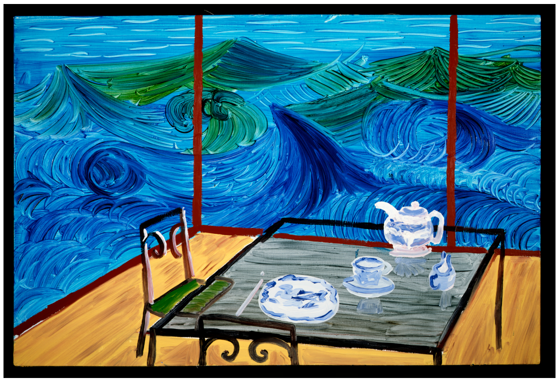
With both glass and water one can choose whether to look *at* or *through*. On the surface of the Pacific Ocean the foamy crests sway this way and that way. Rings ripple outward as a bird dives for prey. The shimmer of light twinkles brilliantly, splendidly. This effect can never be captured, at least not true to life, by either a paintbrush or a camera. Hockney quotes George Herbert:

---

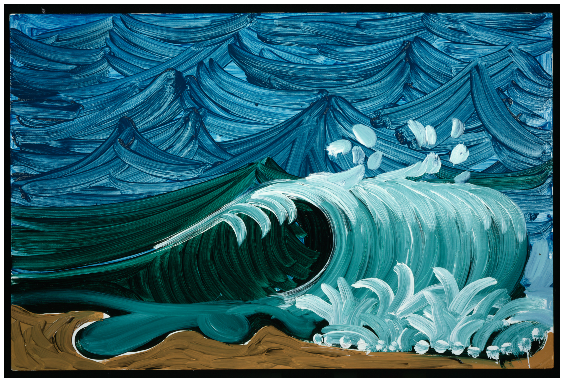
[9] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2005, originally published in 1934), 3.

A man that looks on glasse
on it may stay his eye
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass
and then the heav'n espie[10]

"A simple idea," Hockney goes on, "of how you can choose where to look. As a metaphor it opens up incredible ways of looking, or suggestion. And it uses the surface idea, that there is something the surface can stop. Or, that you can go through it. Even with a sheet of glass, your imagination comes to work more, perhaps, when you've gone through the glass, because the glass disappears. You've made that surface disappear."[11]



4. *Breakfast at Malibu, Wednesday*, 1989

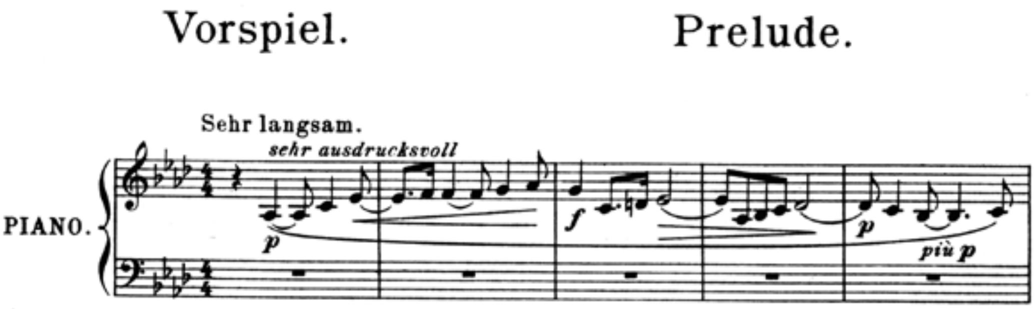


5. *Seascape*, 1989

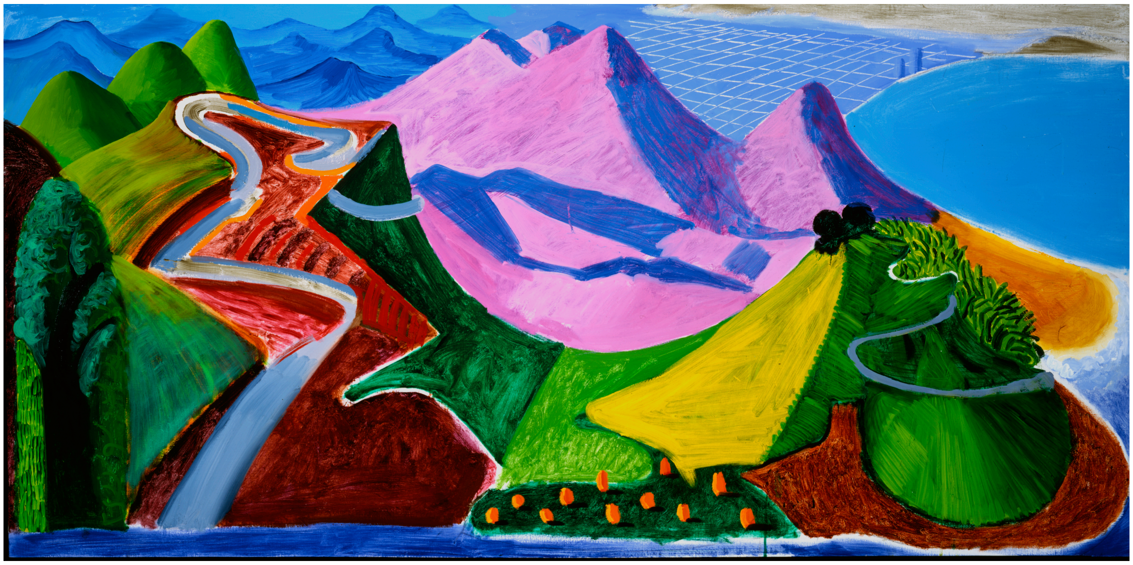
The day had dawned on Malibu over the Santa Monica Mountains, and as the sun crept across the sky there was a stillness that came over the house. Time stretched out in this box of glass, while outside the breezes started stirring. The fog-shrouded Santa Monica Mountains at daybreak might almost be the mysterious environs of Monsalvat, the sloping forests of Arthurian legend. Listen to the first notes of the orchestral prelude to Wagner's *Parsifal*, the gradually rising melody, the awakening day, the trembling brilliance of light as the sun pierces the darkness upon cresting the mountain range.

---

[10] George Herbert, "The Elixir," Stanza 3.
[11] David Hockney, "Looking at Pictures," quoted in Hockney, *That's the way I see it*, 92.

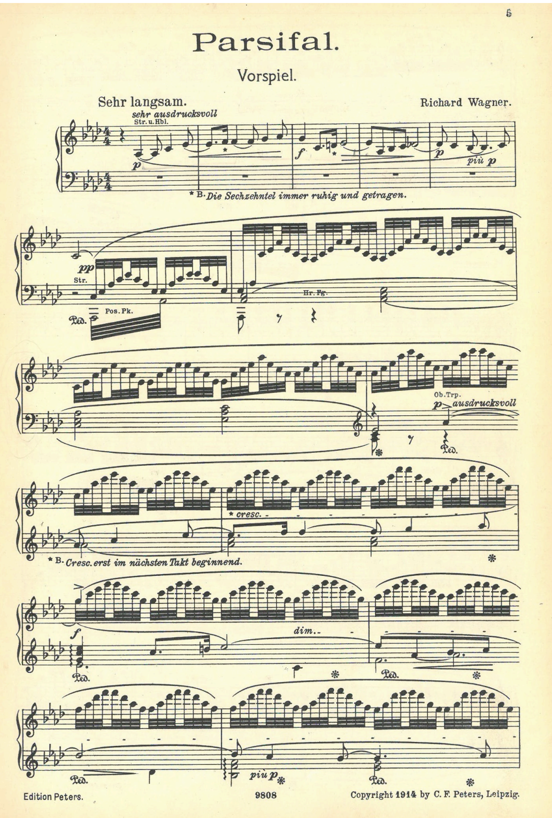

Vorspiel.
Prelude.
Sehr langsam.
sehr ausdrucksvoll
PIANO.
p
f
p
più p

6. *Piano Vocal Score of Richard Wagner's* Parsifal

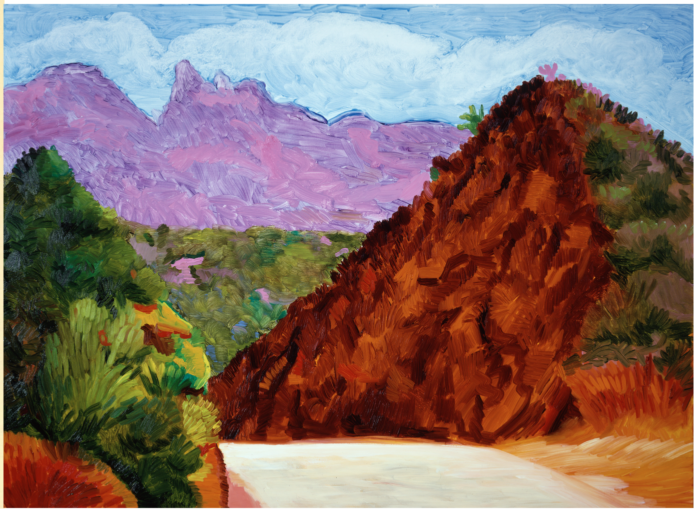


7. *Small Santa Monica & the Bay from the Mountains*, 1990

This music is stirring and the fog is dissipating. The mood of the unfolding music is not locked on any single note, not even the trumpet that conjures the rays of morning puncturing the slumberous dawn. The dynamic coloring of brassy shimmer belongs to no single note alone. Rather, it is contained within the relation of notes to each other, the crescendoing phrase, peaking and subsiding with all the beauty of its restrained might. This is the sunrise, Wagner's *Tagesanbruch,* daybreak.


Parsifal.
Vorspiel.
Sehr langsam.
Richard Wagner.
sehr ausdrucksvoll
*B. Die Sechzehntel immer ruhig und getragen.
*B. Cresc. erst im nächsten Takt beginnend.
Edition Peters.
9808
Copyright 1914 by C. F. Peters, Leipzig.

8. *Piano Vocal Score of Richard Wagner's* Parsifal



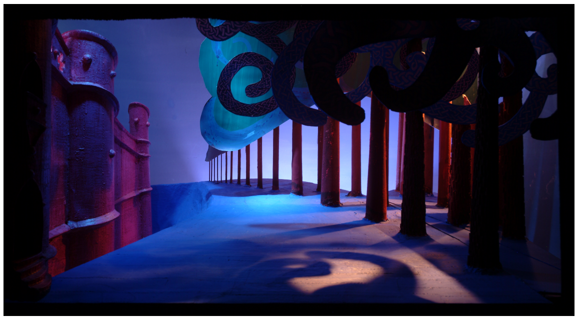
9. *The Cutting*, 1990

In 1987, the year before he painted his Malibu beach house, Hockney had designed the stage sets for an LA Opera production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde.* Though he had been designing for the opera since his 1975 *Rake's Progress* at Glyndebourne, *Tristan* was his first opera in Los Angeles. In 1972 a thirty-four-year-old Hockney chose the *Liebestod* from *Tristan* as his favorite piece of music on the British radio program Desert Island Discs. The *Liebestod,* arguably one of the most operatic moments in all of opera, happens at the end of Act III. In the final moments Isolde sinks onto Tristan's lifeless corpse in a cosmic rapture of transfigured love-death. This music was on Hockney's mind again with renewed attention in the late 1980s as he was designing the stage sets for the LA Opera.

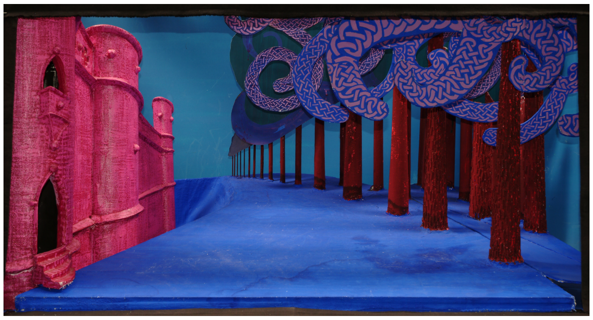
"[T]he story isn't the words…*it's the music*. It's *in* the music. When I start work on an opera, I maybe read the libretto once, but then I set it aside and hardly ever go back to it: I just listen to the music over and over and over again. And the story *Tristan*'s music tells is…overwhelmingly moving, really. It's ravishing."[12] Listening to the music over and over again, but listening dialectically. On the one hand, there is listening to *Tristan* on a compact disc in the car, matching its shifts to the shifting landscape. On the other hand, there is listening to it in the opera house, with the flickering lights animating the painted stage. One setting clarifies the other. A drive can be research for an opera; an opera the source of ideas for a drive. The experiences are very aesthetically different. Sitting in the passenger seat of Hockney's red Mercedes, cruising comfortably along the Pacific Coast Highway, you feel the shimmer of life in a different way than you do from a seat in the Founder's Circle at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on opening night. Having music in the car transfigures death like Tristan and Isolde do themselves. Their hearts never really stop beating, not even after death. Isolde's rapture, so full of echoes and scents, waves and swells, billows and surges and seething. Driving up the coast, the water glimmers out on the left to the horizon; the mountains on the right are cut by winding canyon roads: Tuna Canyon, Las Flores Canyon, and Malibu Canyon. These wiggly lines invite the driver who is driving to drive to continue on into the idyllic wilderness.

---

[12] Lawrence Weschler, *True to Life: Twenty-Five Years of Conversations with David Hockney* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 93 (emphasis in original).



10. Stage Design for *Tristan und Isolde, Act II,* 1987



11. Stage Design for *Tristan und Isolde, Act II,* 1987

In the opera house, the dawn is achieved by lighting cues, timed precisely to match the dawn in the music. In the car, it is the music that is cued to match the light, now poking through the forest trees or mirrored on the surface of the ocean. In the opera house, you sit still with three thousand other people. In the car, there is all the intimacy of a music motion picture for just two people with Hockney as both stage and musical director. They are roles he relishes with the contagious enthusiasm of a lifelong student.

In 1988, the year of the Malibu beach house paintings, the year after the Los Angeles *Tristan*, Hockney appeared in a film called *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China*, offering his analysis of a seventeenth century Chinese landscape hand scroll. In the film, brimming with enthusiasm, Hockney takes the viewers on a forty-five minute trip through *The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour (scroll seven)* from 1698, made by Wang Hui and his assistants. The film is another type of drive, or better yet, not a drive, but a helicopter trip, not through Malibu and the Santa Monica Mountains, but along the Grand Canal in seventeenth century China— the Emperor has come to inspect his territories.

The scroll for Hockney is a picture without edges. "Canaletto is clearly seen as a kind of window," he says. "The scroll isn't a window. It's not that way of seeing. If I can move the edges, both edges, then they can go where I want. I can go backwards and forwards. The top represents the sky, maybe the bottom represents me. It means you control the edges. And this makes it quite a different picture."[13] For Hockney this difference is crucial; the virtue of a picture without edges is that the picture lacks a vanishing point. Thus the perspective continually shifts as the viewer's eyes dart from one scene to the next. When your eyes dwell for a moment on a street corner in the Wang Hui scroll you can see the sides of buildings as if from on top of the bridge. But you can see the side of the bridge as well, as if from the bank of the canal. Depending where your eye alights, you can feel the location of your viewing body change.

In *Principles of Chinese Painting*, a text that Hockney is familiar with, George Rowley links the experience of a landscape scroll to the experience of music:

> Chinese painting is an art of time as well as of space…A scroll painting must be experienced in time like music…Our attention is carried along laterally…The design as a whole will, like music, have a beginning, development, and ending. Many scrolls parallel the musical sequence of exposition, development, and recapitulation…in order to describe such an experience in time we instinctively avoid the terms for spatial design and resort to the terminology of music; we speak of themes and their expansion, contraction, and inversion, of melodic lines and their counterpoint, of the accelerandos and ritardandos of spacing, and even of crescendos and diminuendos as the landscapes become thick and profuse or fade away into the nothingness of mist. The right timing of these qualities depends on lateral movement rather than on movement in depth, and the lines of movement are not mere leading lines but linear melodies which are the very substance of the design.[14]

---

[13] David Hockney and Philip Haas, *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China or: Surface is Illusion but so is Depth* (Milestone Films, 1988), VHS.

[14] George Rowley, *The Principles of Chinese Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 61.

Wang Hui (1632–1717) and assistants

12. Arthur Kolat looking at a reproduction of Wang Hui's landscape hand scrolls

Music, of course. Hockney is listening to the scroll, and his film is a symphonic highlights album of sorts. He is listening to the scroll but also driving through it. For Hockney, the stakes of non-Western versus Western ways of depicting space could not be higher. Wang Hui versus Caneletto is the difference between joy and sadness, animation and inaction, intimacy and alienation, life and death, being human and being inert. Because a vanishing point is infinity, one manner of depicting space is an infinite, omnipresent, pantheistic god, and the other is a removed, isolated, inaccessible divinity. Mulling it over, Hockney posits, "I think there is possibly a great connection between the way we depict space and the way we behave in it."[15]

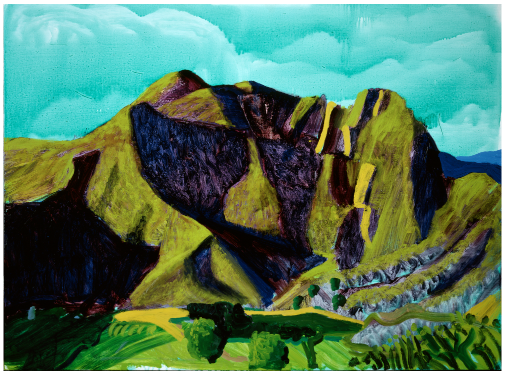
Lawrence Weschler describes one of the ways Hockney behaves in space, from behind the steering wheel of his red convertible:

> Hockney's Mercedes was one of the very first vehicles anywhere to be fitted with what was then an experimental onboard CD player, its ten-deck platform secreted in the trunk of the car…a rousing Sousa march for starters and then Bernstein, Gershwin, the 'Blue Danube'—brief perfectly chosen passages from each until he veered off the main highway onto one of those steep side roads that wend their way high into the Santa Monica mountains, at which point...the music would segue into Wagner, as up and over that initial incline you'd be cruising and then down upon

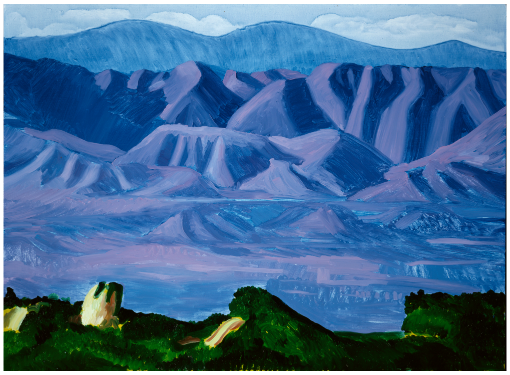
---

[15] Hockney, *A Day on the Grand Canal.*

> the first unexpected valley vista: the Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla. And so on, across that valley and up its far purpled slope, through one perfectly chosen Wagner passage after another, Hockney pacing the car just right so that Wagner's transitions seamlessly matched the road's own curves and croppings, and the constrictions and the dilations of the endlessly changing view. Mainly orchestral passages from *Parsifal*, as you looped in and among the canyons and then finally back up the main spine of the mountains for the return toward the shore. And if Hockney had managed to time things just right—and usually he had—the music itself would now be reaching its most thrilling climax yet (Siegfried's funeral), exactly one hour and twenty minutes into the drive, just as the car rounded a final bend, suddenly divulging a stupendous sudden view of one last valley at the very moment the sun was sinking behind the far darkened slope.[16]



13. *Mountain from Stunt Road*, 1990



14. *The Valley*, 1990

Pulling back into the Malibu beach house the drive has ended. The sun— like the operatic curtain—has come gradually down on the action. Driving in Los Angeles, a nerve-wracking disadvantage of life in the city, has been transfigured. It has been transfigured into an artwork in which motion is not only implied, it is literal. Painting and photography can convey a sense of motion but in the end their surfaces are still. In opera and film, the scene or picture is moving but the viewing body sits still in a chair. In the car, though, one's body is actually moving, hurtling through space, moving through the world, looking, and never quite knowing where the shimmer of life will appear.

---

[16] Weschler, *True to Life*, 87.

Figures

Figure 1. David Hockney. “Flight Into Italy—Swiss Landscape” 1962
Oil on canvas, 72 x 72” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Prudence Cuming Associates
Collection Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

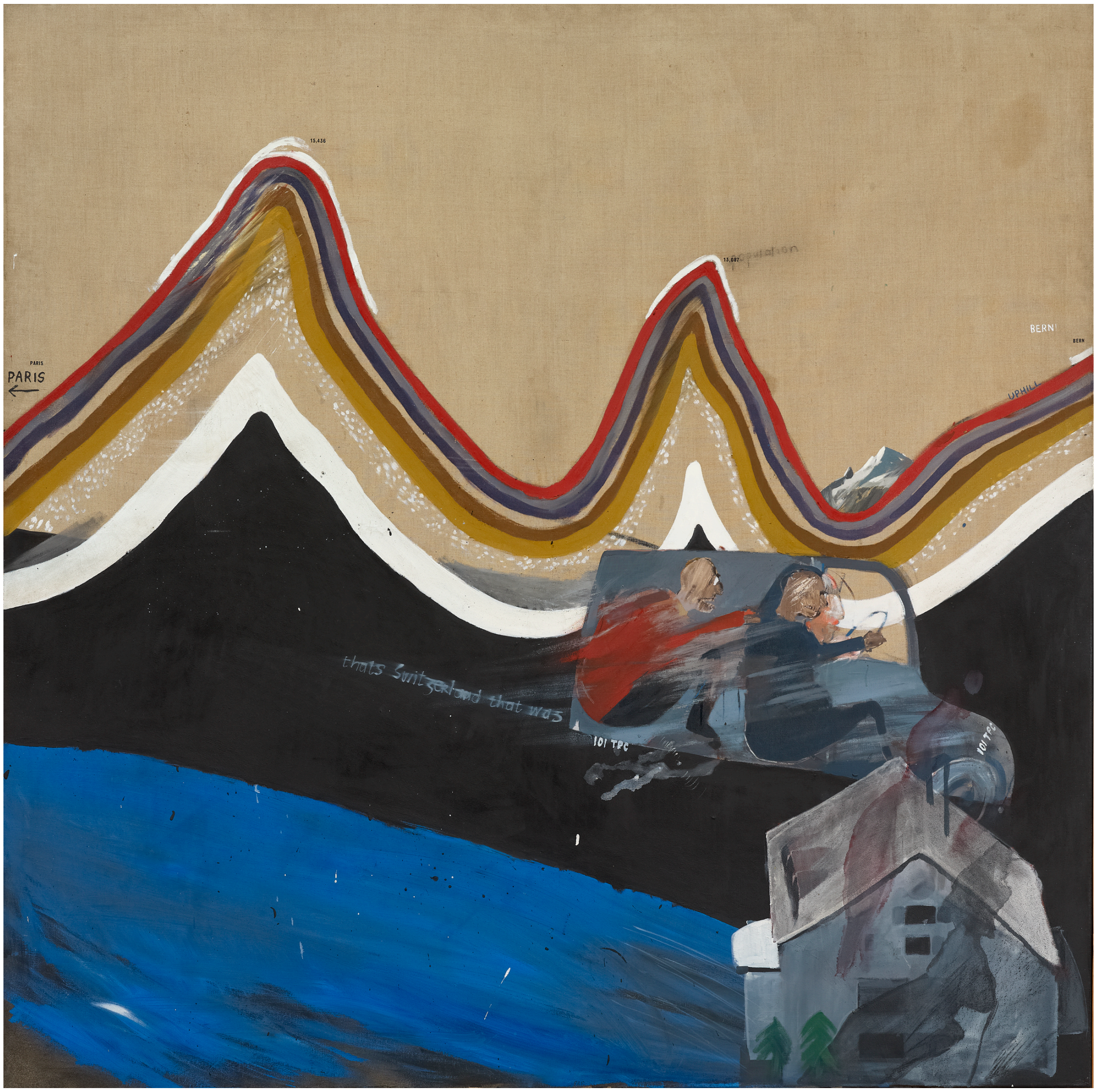
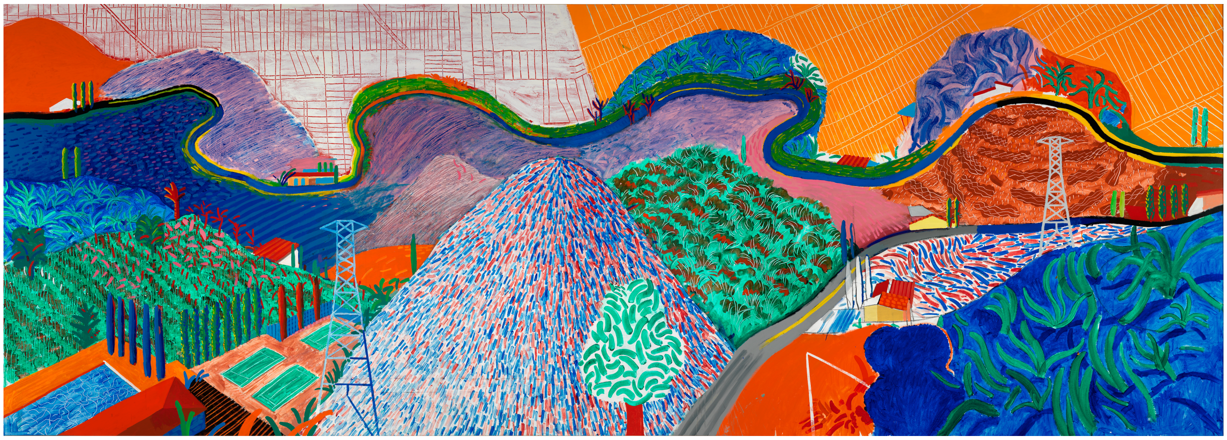

15,436
13,087
population
PARIS
PARIS
BERN!
BERN
UPHILL
thats Switzerland that was
101 TPC
101 TPC

Figure 2. David Hockney. "Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio" 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 86 x 243" ©David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt
Collection Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)



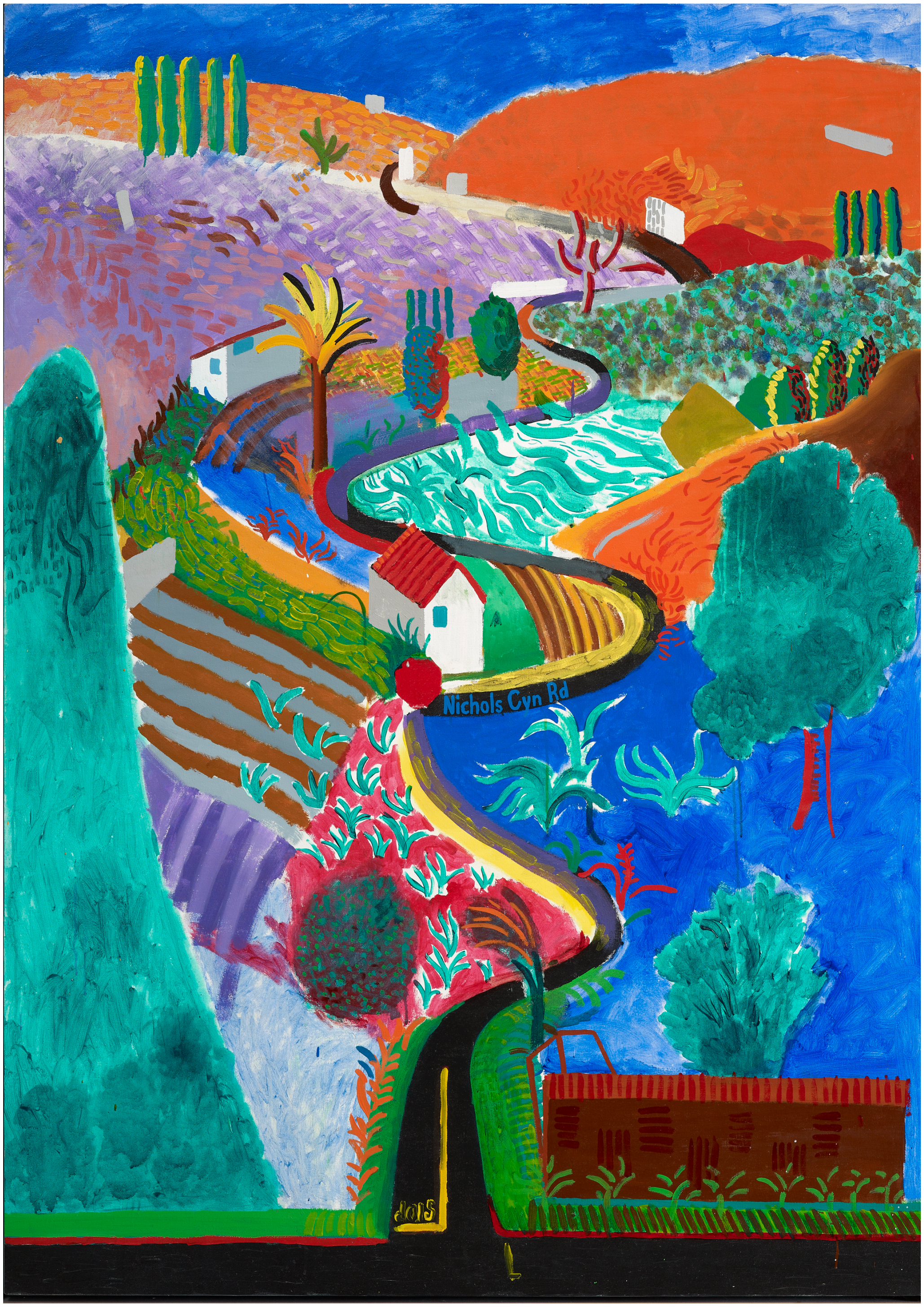

Nichols Cyn Rd

Figure 3. David Hockney. "Nichols Canyon" 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Prudence Cuming Associates

Figure 4. David Hockney. "R.V. Zion Canyon, Utah, Oct. 1982"
Photographic Collage, 48 ¼ x 47 ¾ " © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

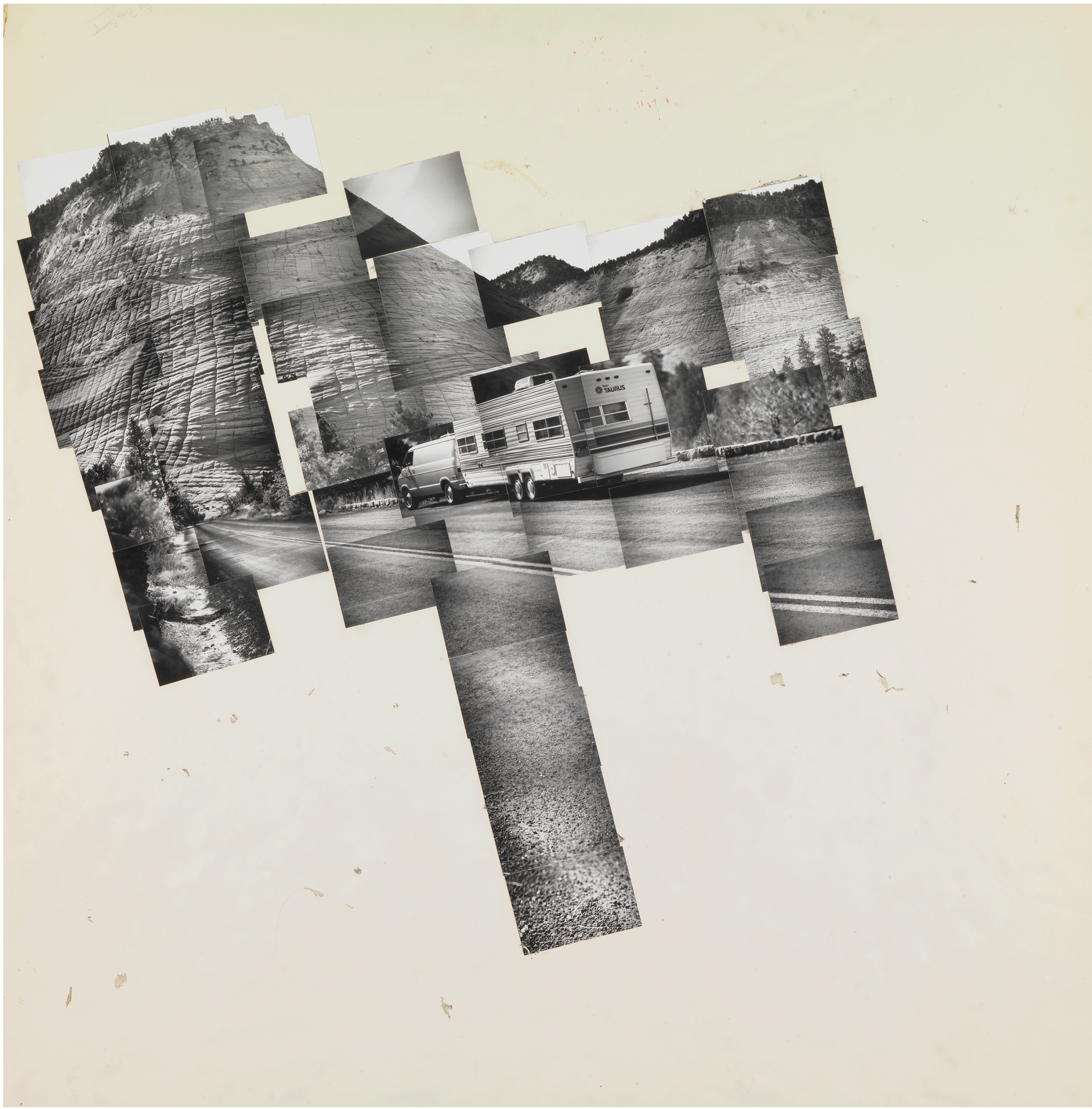


Figure 5. David Hockney. “Steering Wheel, October 1982”
Photographic Collage, 30 x 36” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

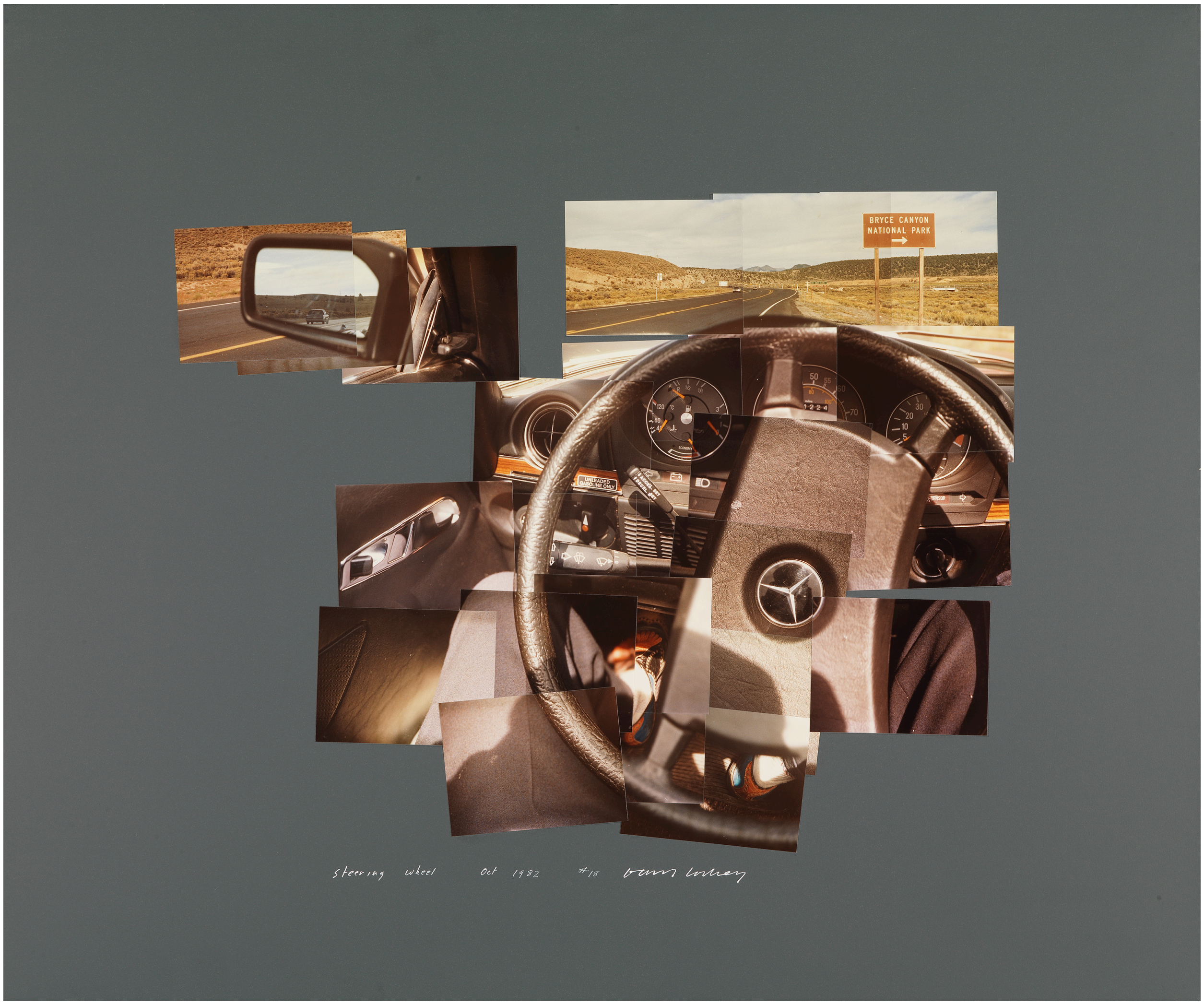

BRYCE CANYON
NATIONAL PARK
steering wheel Oct 1982 #18

Figure 6. David Hockney.
“Pearblossom Hwy. 11 – 18th April 1986 (Second Version)”
Photographic collage, 71 ½ x 107” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

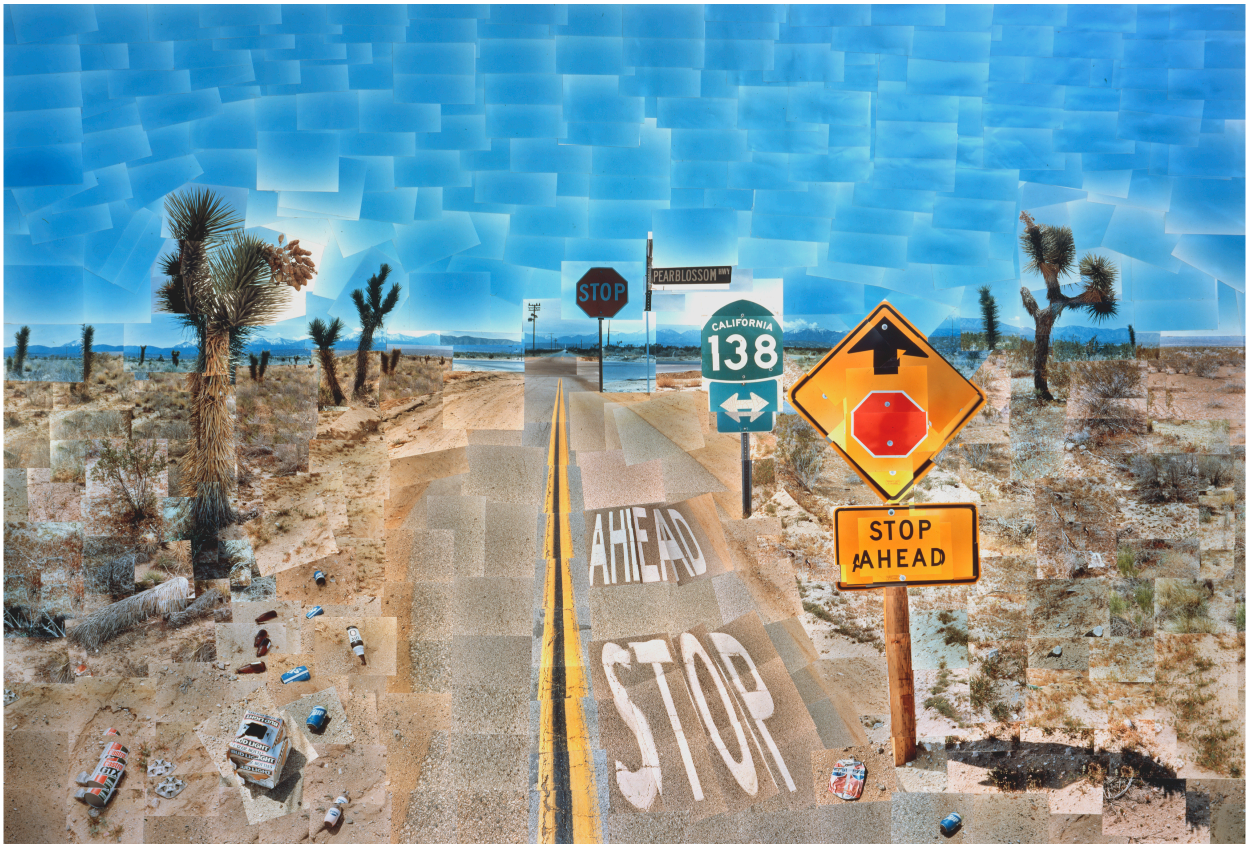

STOP
PEARBLOSSOM HWY
CALIFORNIA
138
STOP
AHEAD
AHEAD
STOP

Figure 7. David Hockney. "Mulholland Drive, June 1986"
Homemade Print, Edition of 50, 11 x 17" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

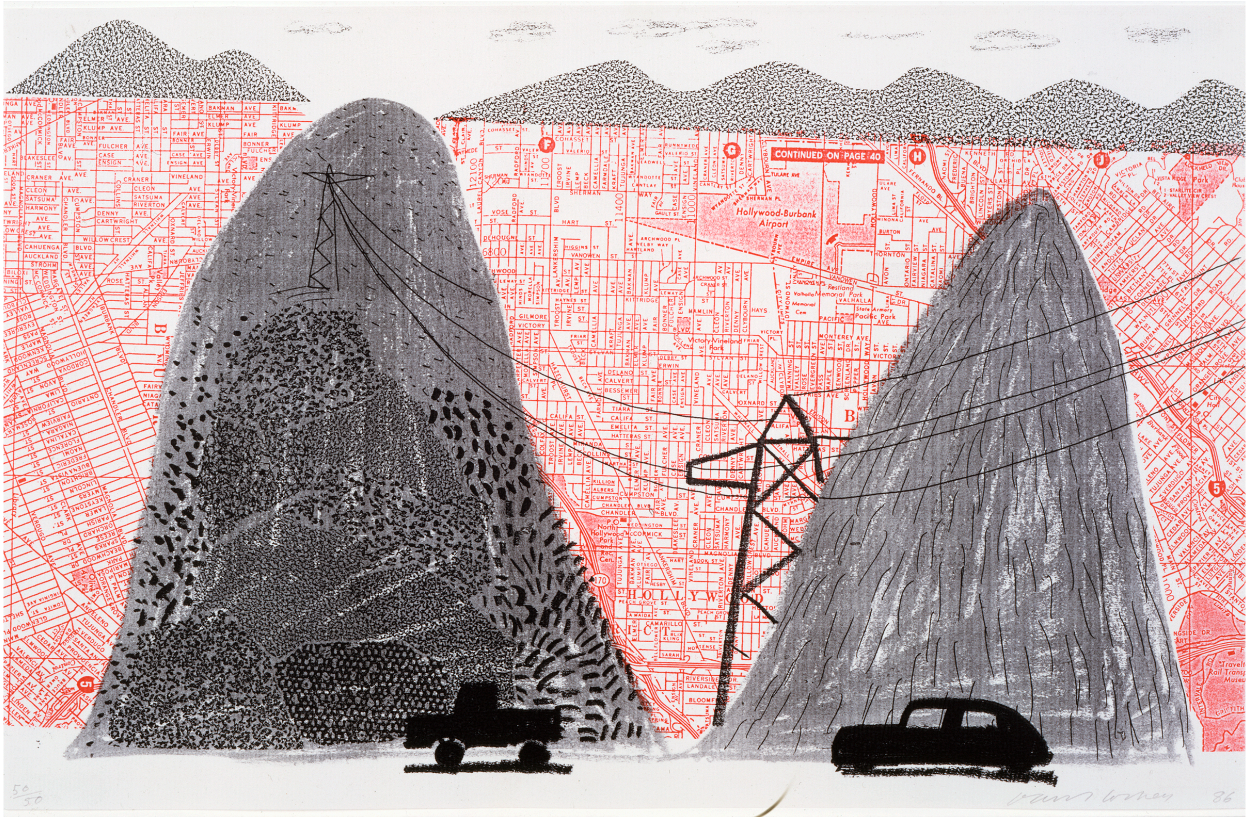


**Figure 8. David Hockney. 1 – ½ " scale model, Act I, from "Tristan und Isolde"
© David Hockney, Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt**

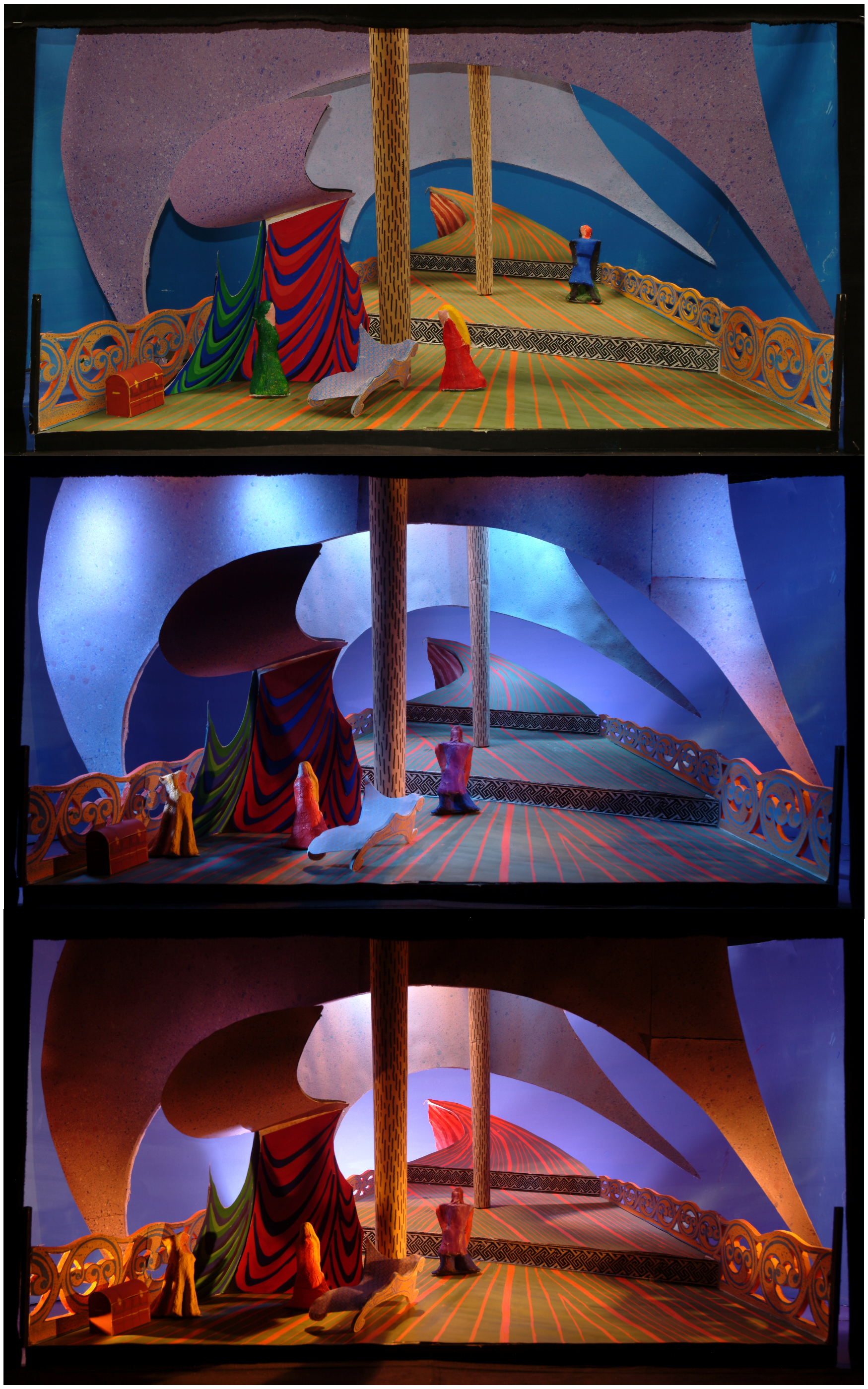


Figure 9. David Hockney. “The Road to Malibu” 1988
Oil on three canvases, 24 x 96”
© David Hockney

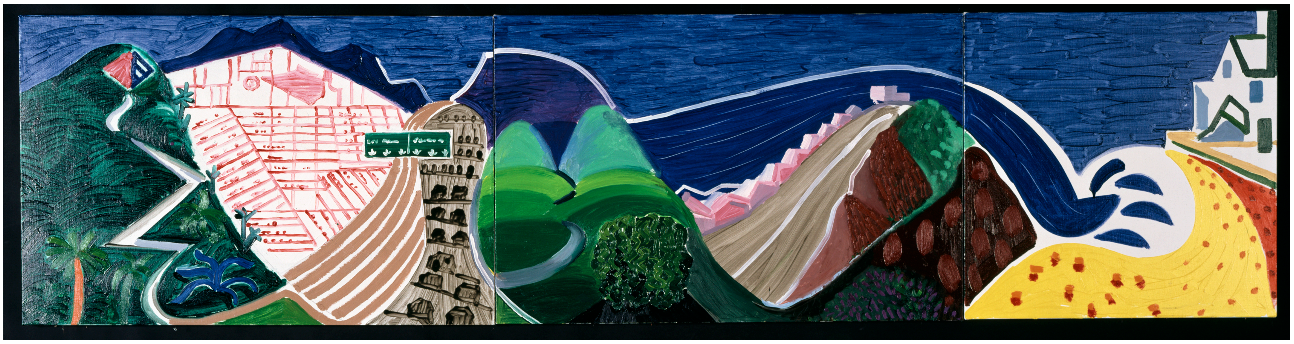


Figure 10. David Hockney. “Pacific Coast Highway and Santa Monica” 1990
Oil on canvas, 78 x 120” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Steve Oliver

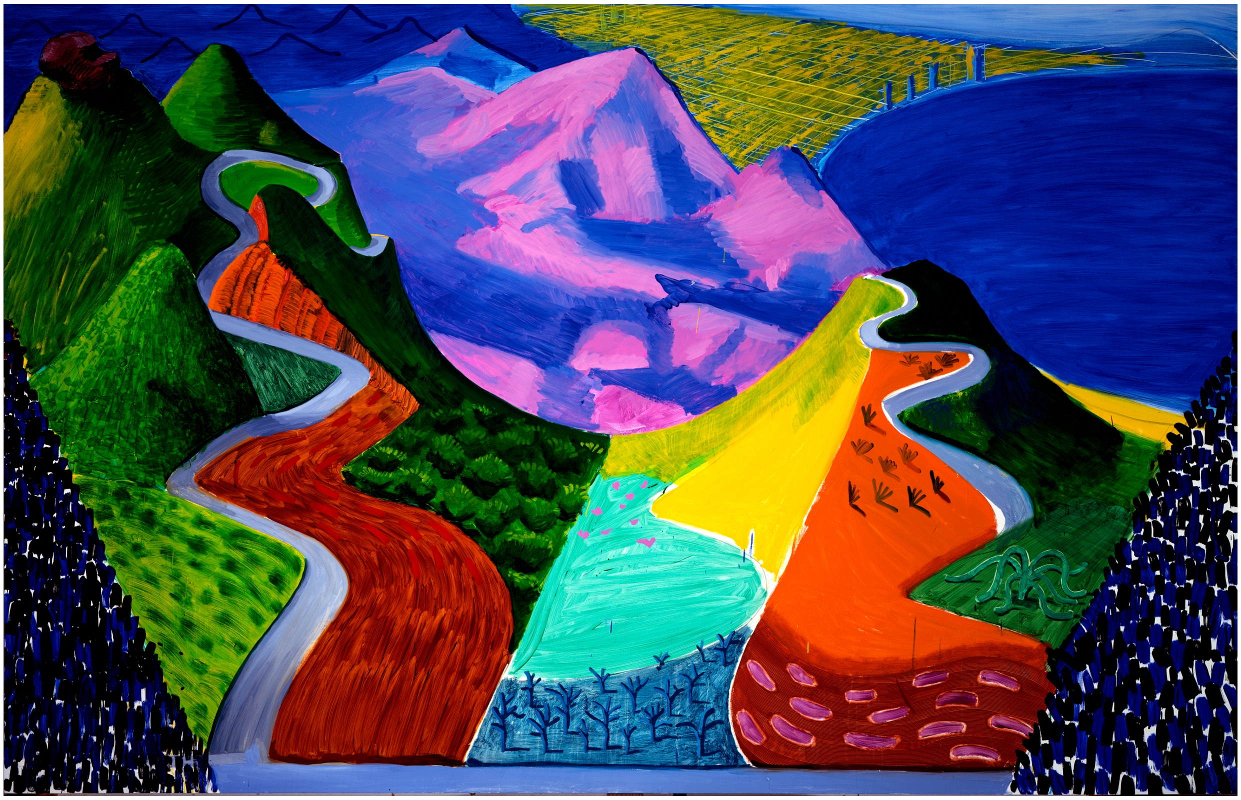


Figure 11. David Hockney. “The Cutting” 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48” © David Hockney

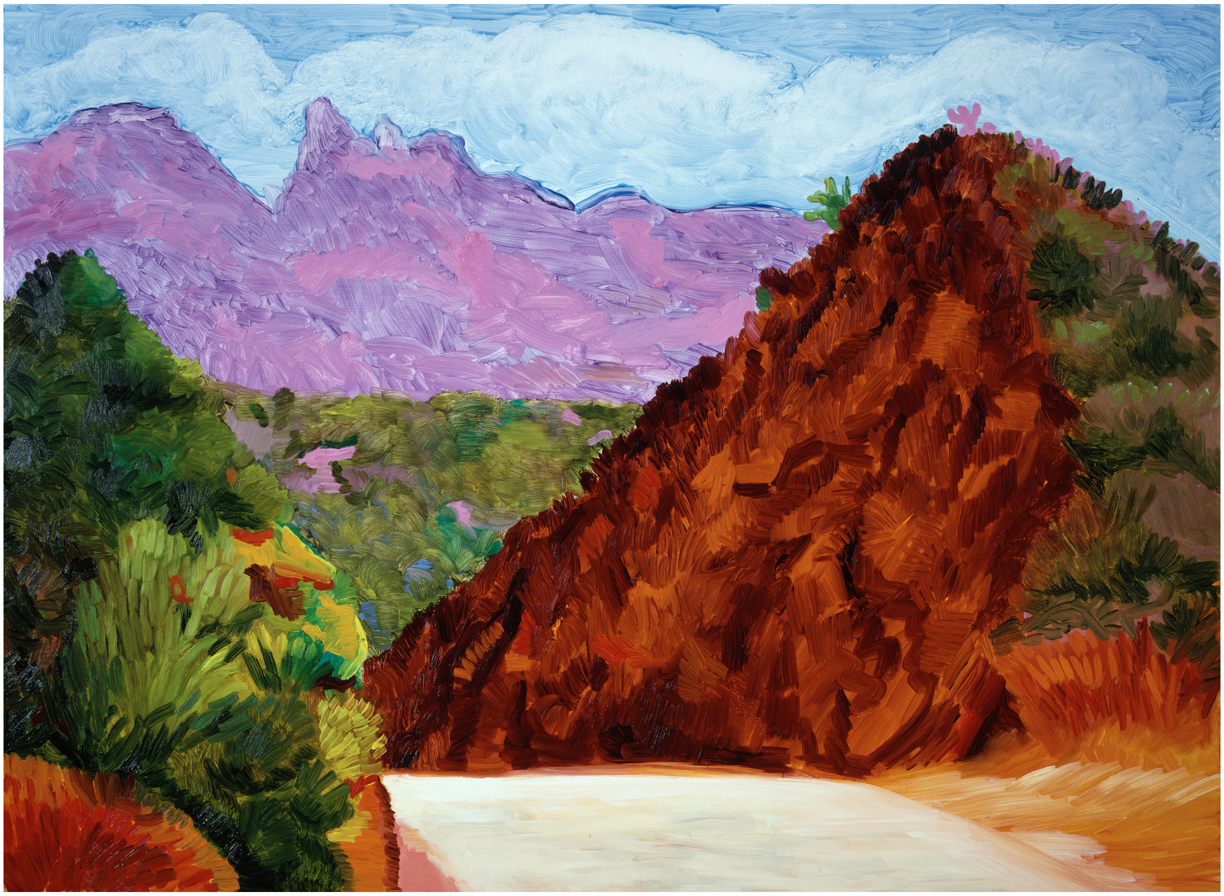


Figure 12. David Hockney. "Thrusting Rocks" 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 36" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Steve Oliver

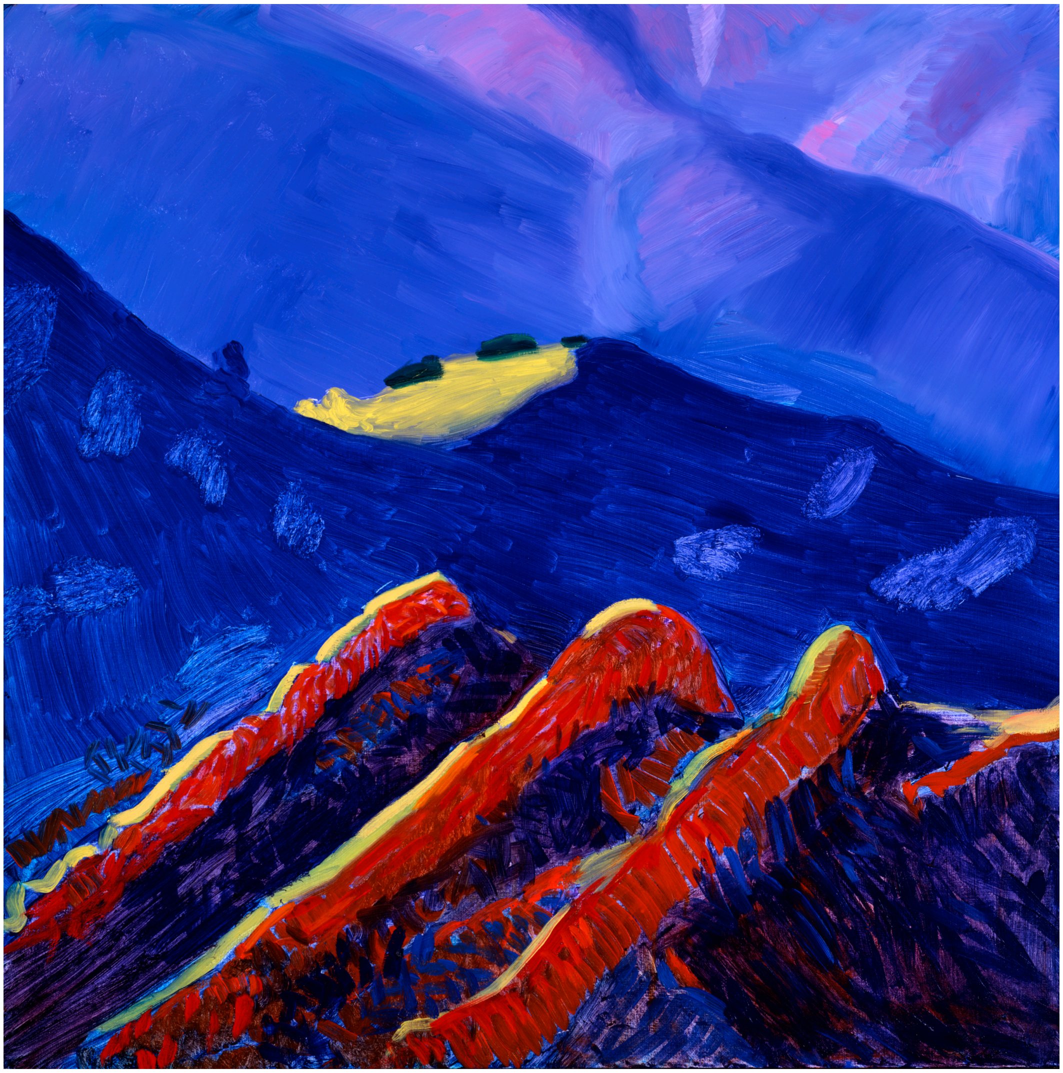


Figure 13. David Hockney. "The Valley" 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Steve Oliver

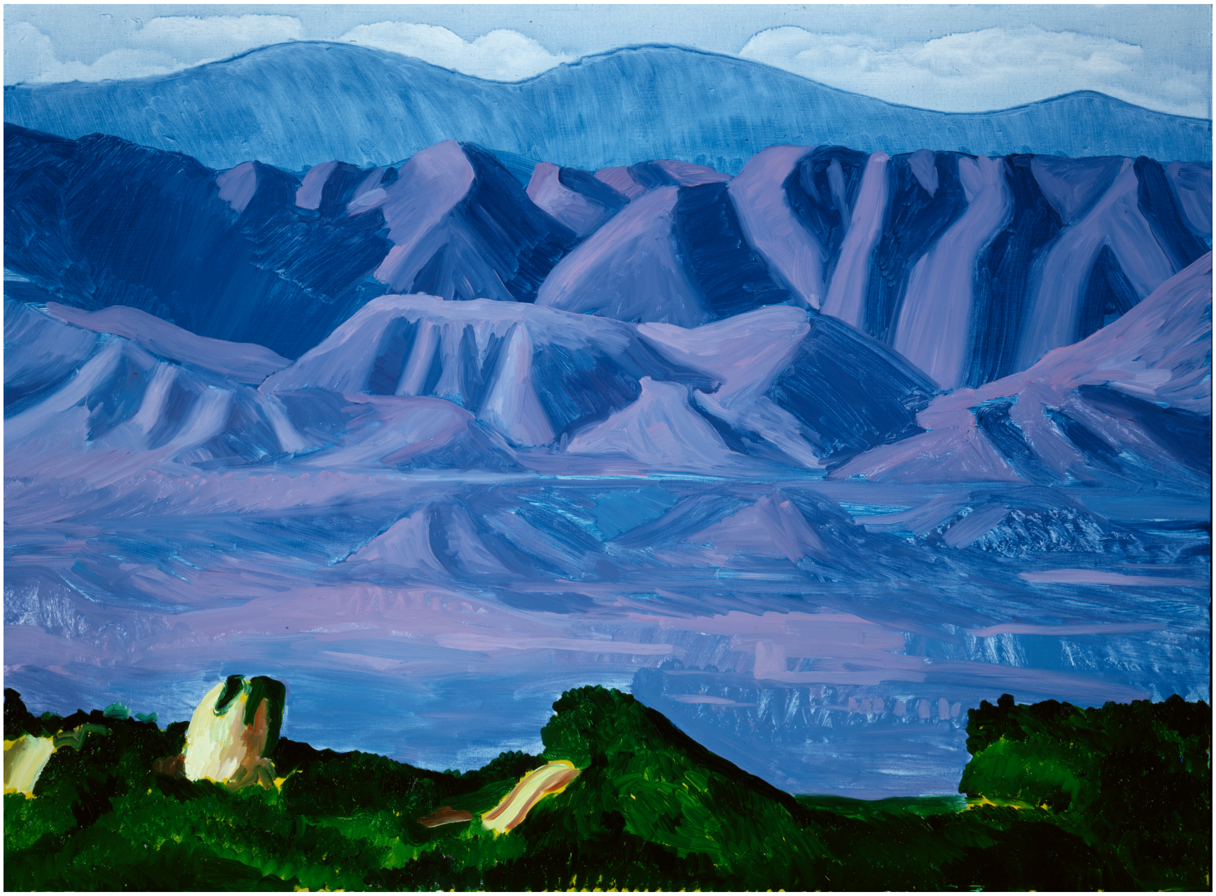


Figure 14. David Hockney. “Mountain from Stunt Road” 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48” © David Hockney
Collection Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City

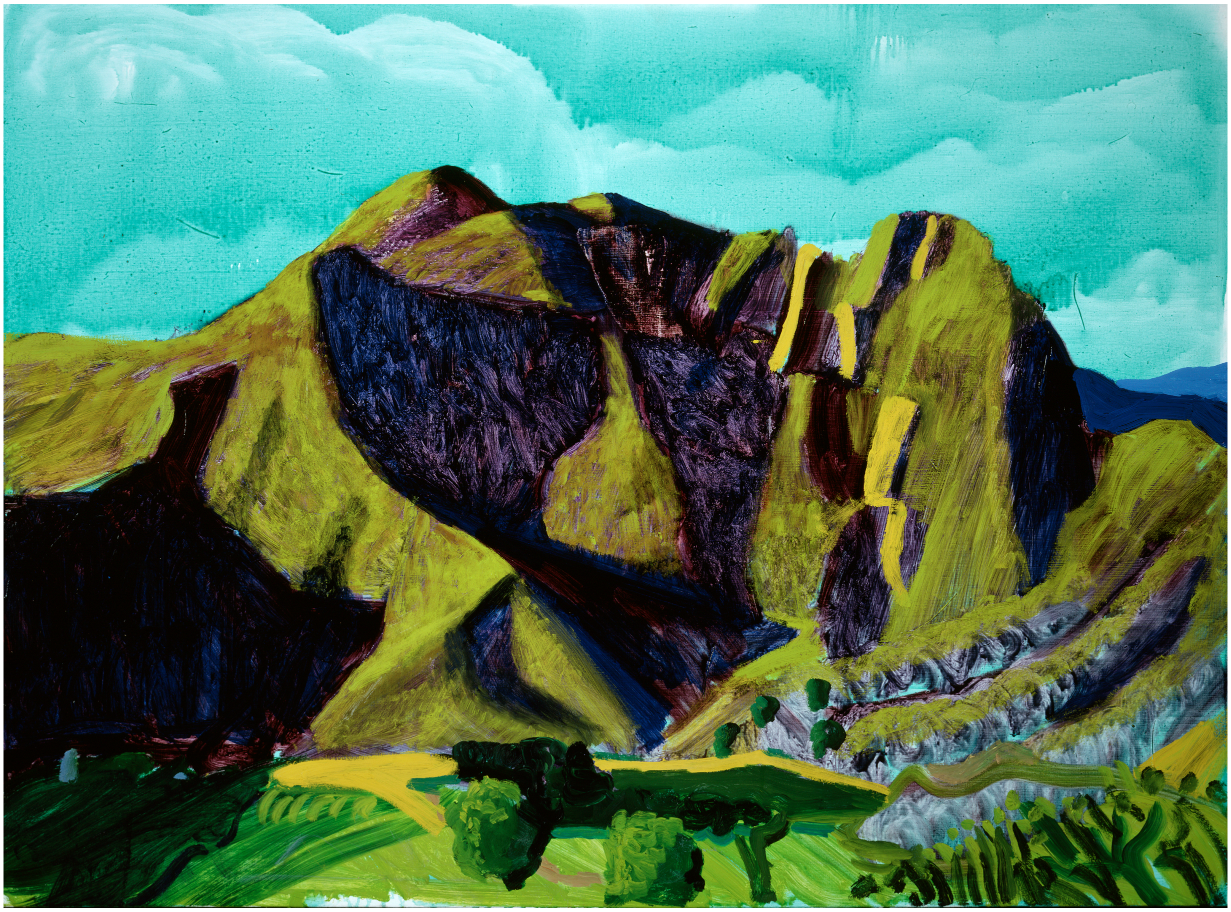


Figure 15. David Hockney. "The Red Mountain" 1990
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

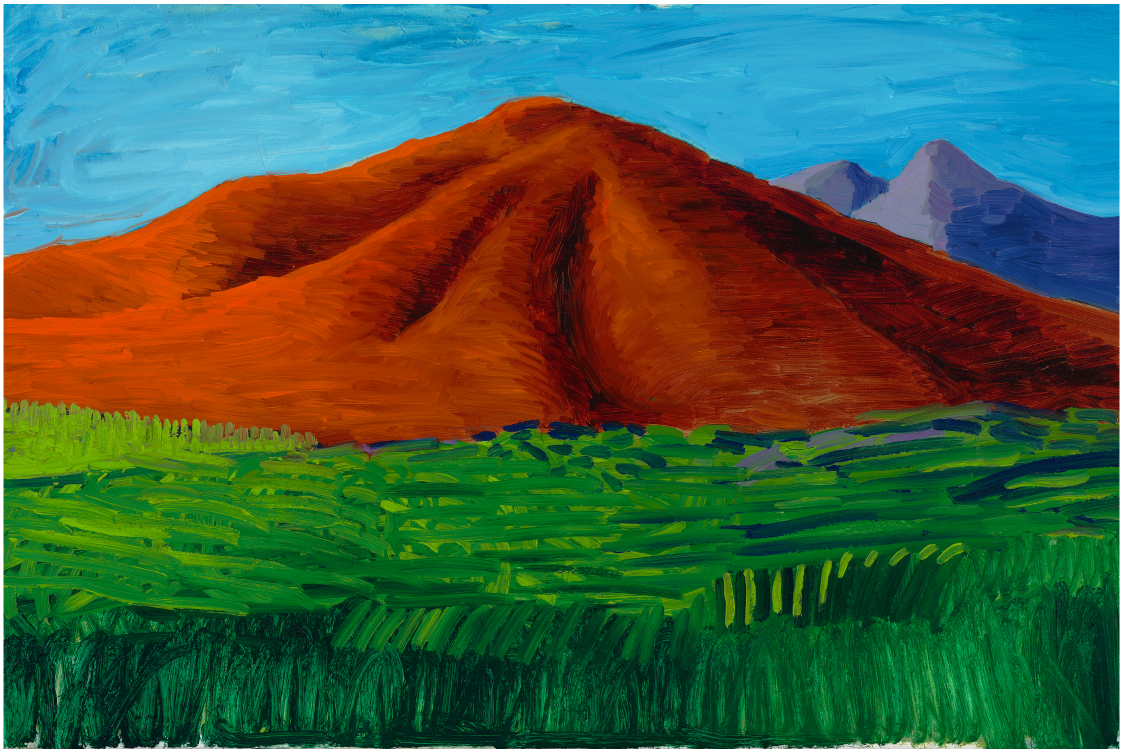


Figure 16. David Hockney. “Spectators in Alaska, June 1990”
Color Laser Printed Photograph, 28 x 41” (9 panel)
© David Hockney

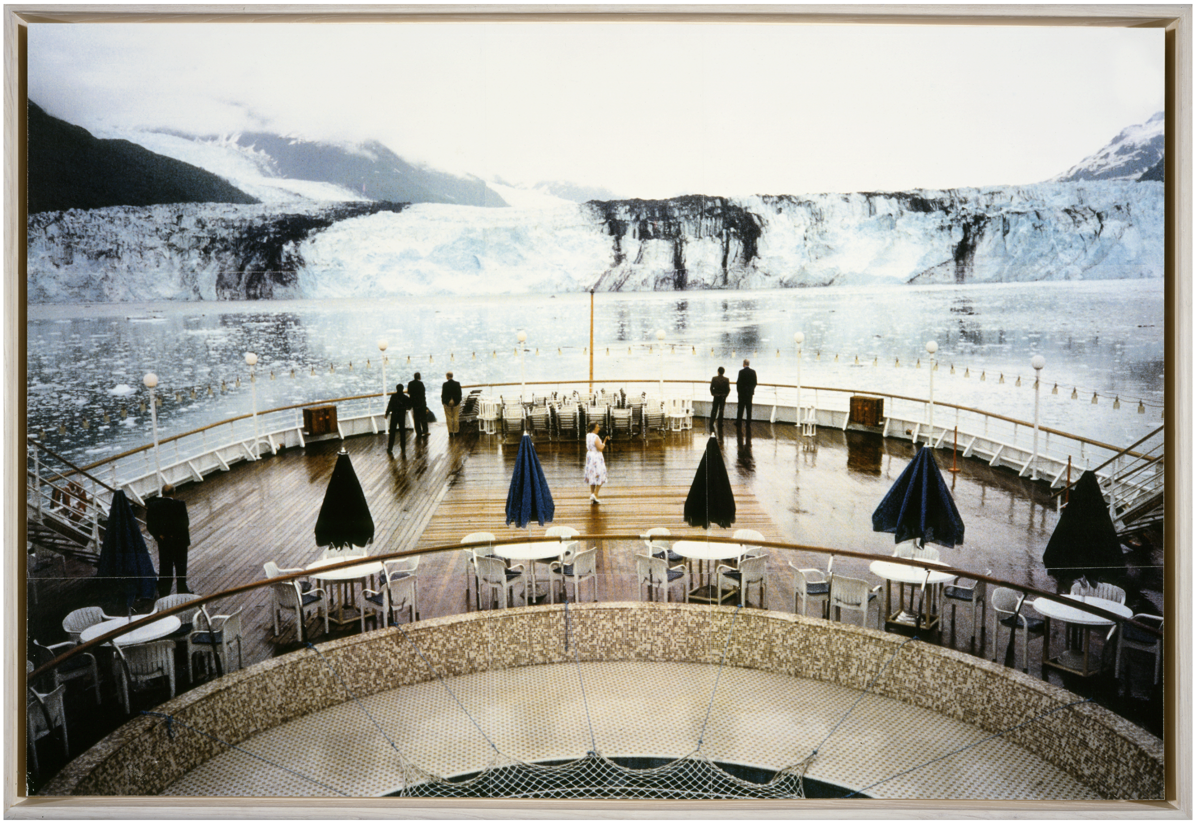


Figure 17. David Hockney. “The Road to York through Sledmere” 1997
Oil on canvas, 48 x 60” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

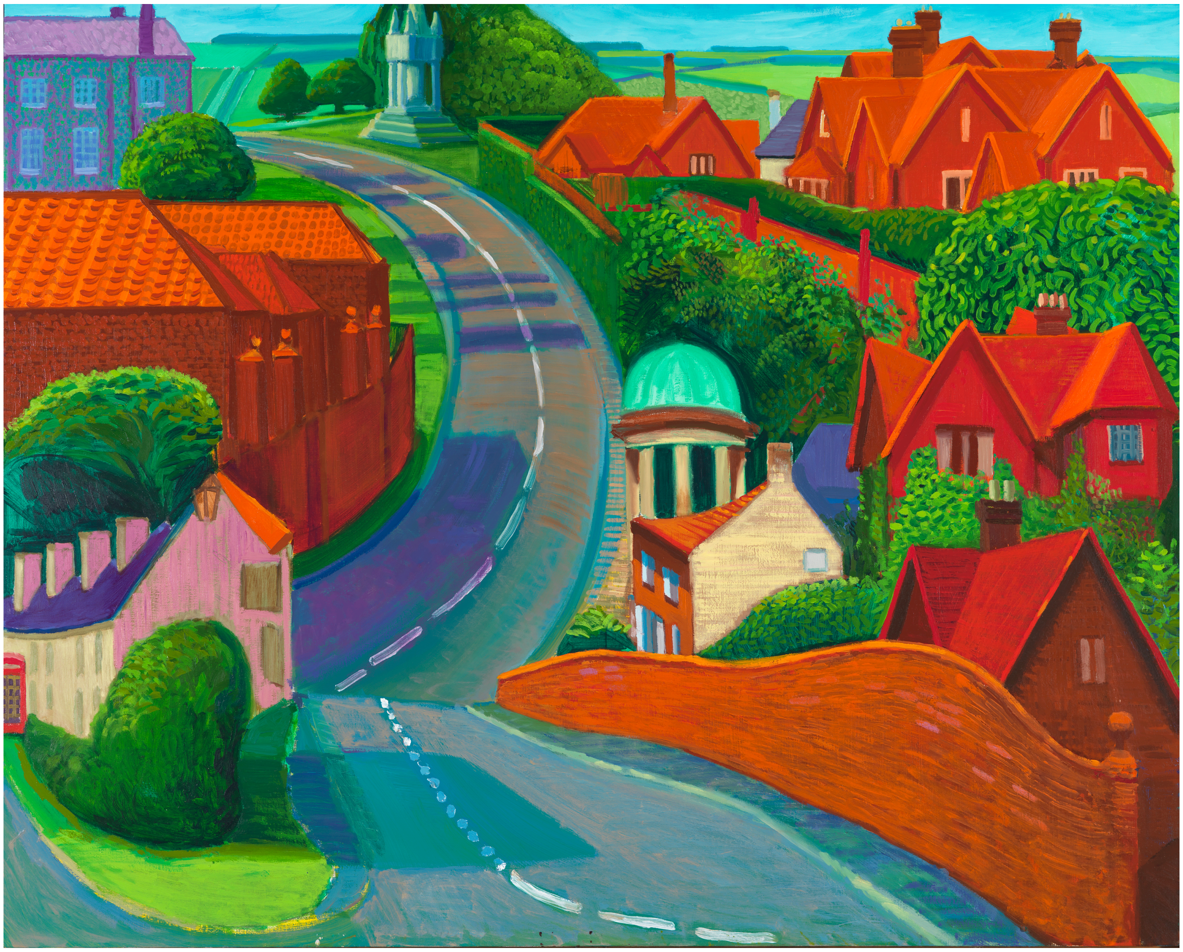


Figure 18. David Hockney. "Garrowby Hill" 1998
Oil on canvas, 60 x 76" © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Prudence Cuming Associates
Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

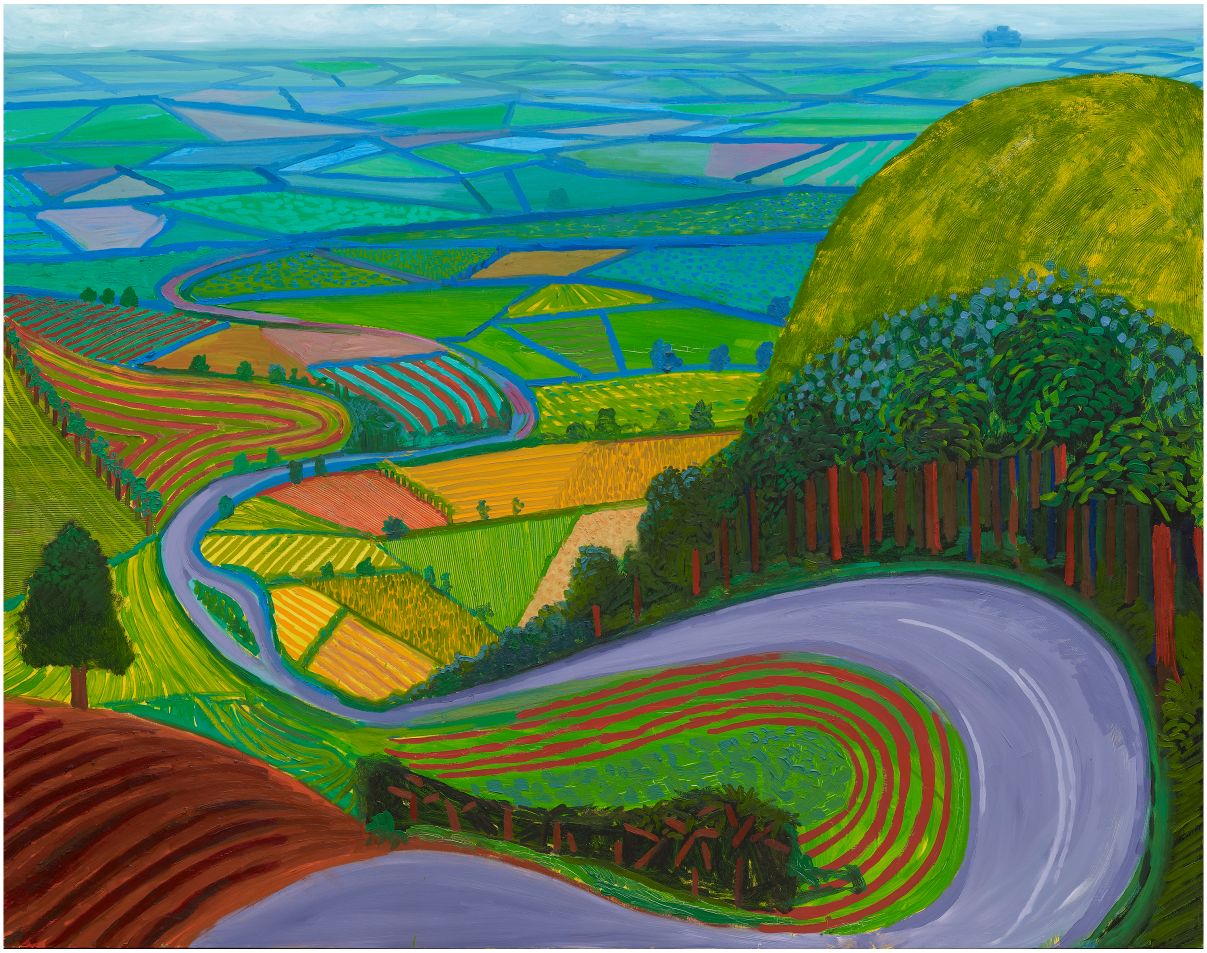


Figure 19. David Hockney. “Midsummer: East Yorkshire” 2004
36 watercolors on paper, 15 x 22 ½ ” each © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt
Collection The David Hockney Foundation

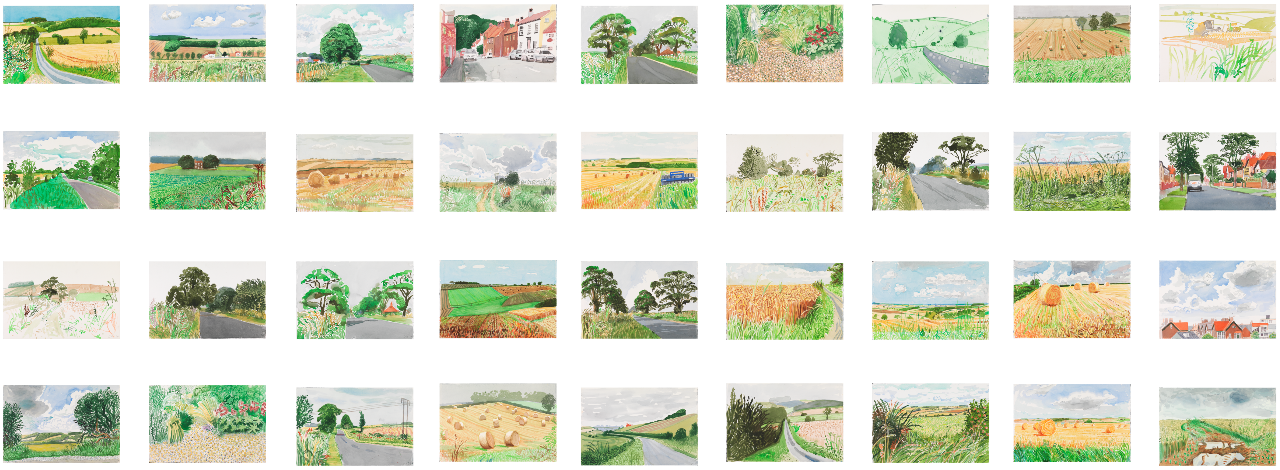


Figure 20. David Hockney
“The Four Seasons, Woldgate Woods (Spring 2011, Summer 2010, Autumn 2010, Winter 2010)” 2010-2011
36 digital videos
synchronized and presented on 36 monitors to comprise a single artwork
Edition of 10 with 2 A.P.s
Duration: 4:21
©David Hockney

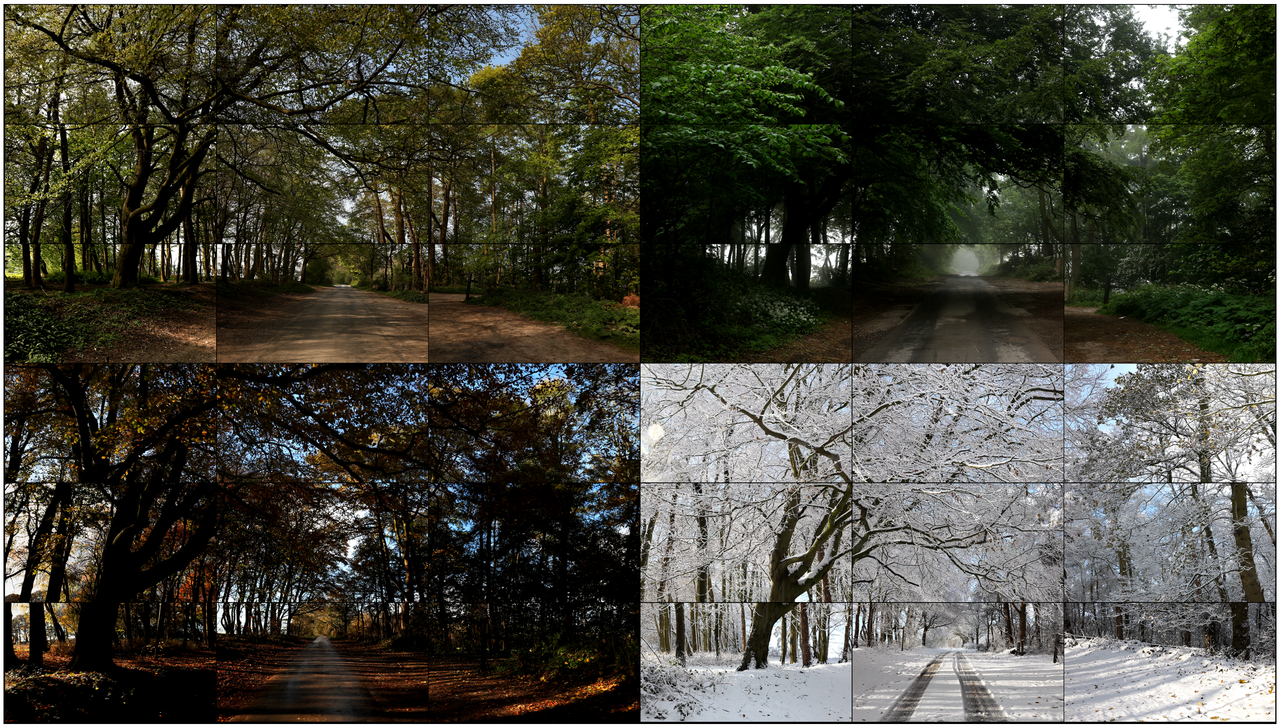


Figure 21. Left: David Hockney. “Untitled, 14 May 2011”
iPad drawing © David Hockney

Right Top: David Hockney directing nine cameras, assisted by Jonathan Wilkinson, April 2010 © David Hockney, Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima

Right Middle: David Hockney drawing with nine cameras, April 2010 © David Hockney, Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima

Right Bottom: Filming the tunnel with nine cameras, 4 November 2011 © David Hockney, Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima

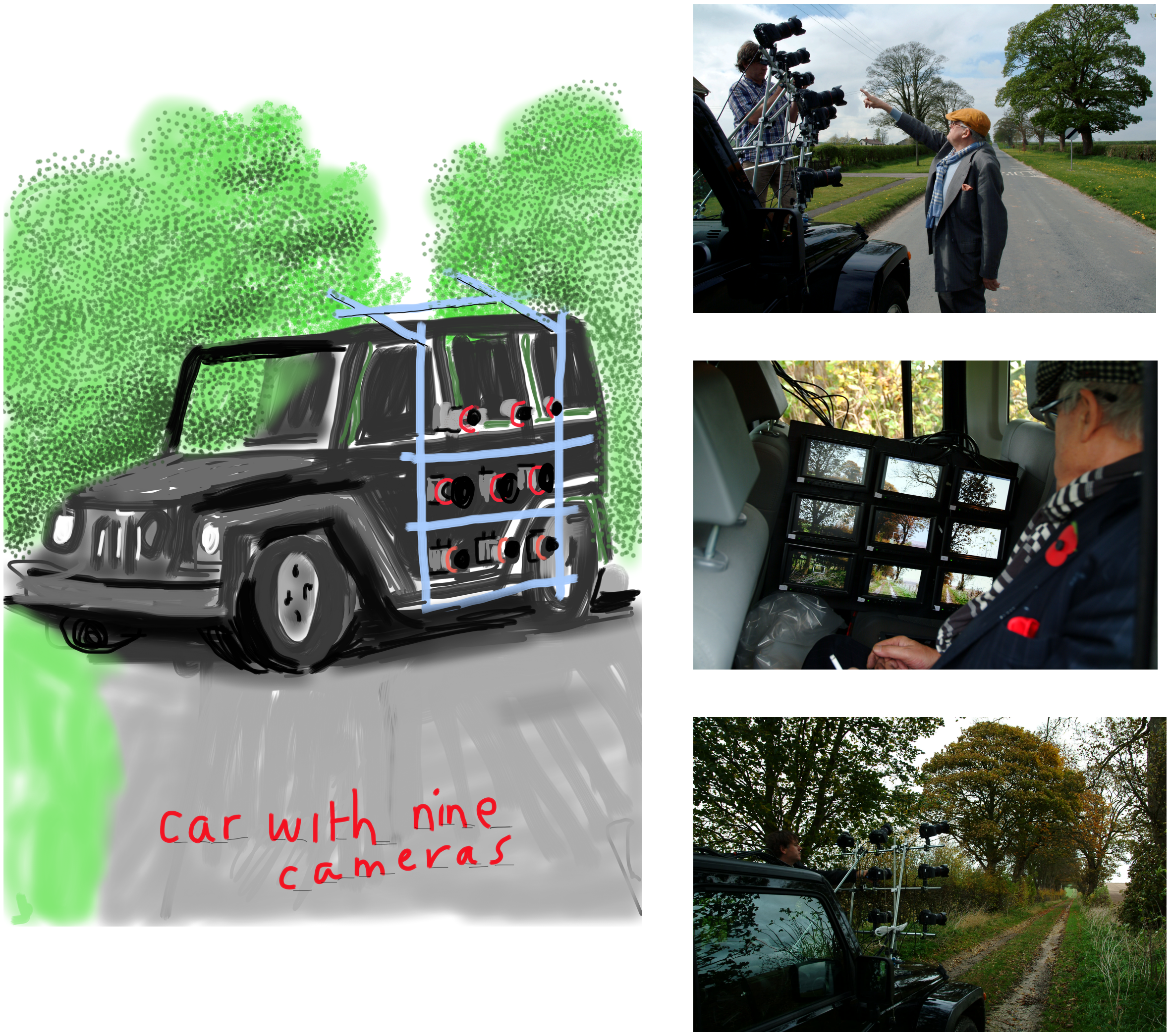
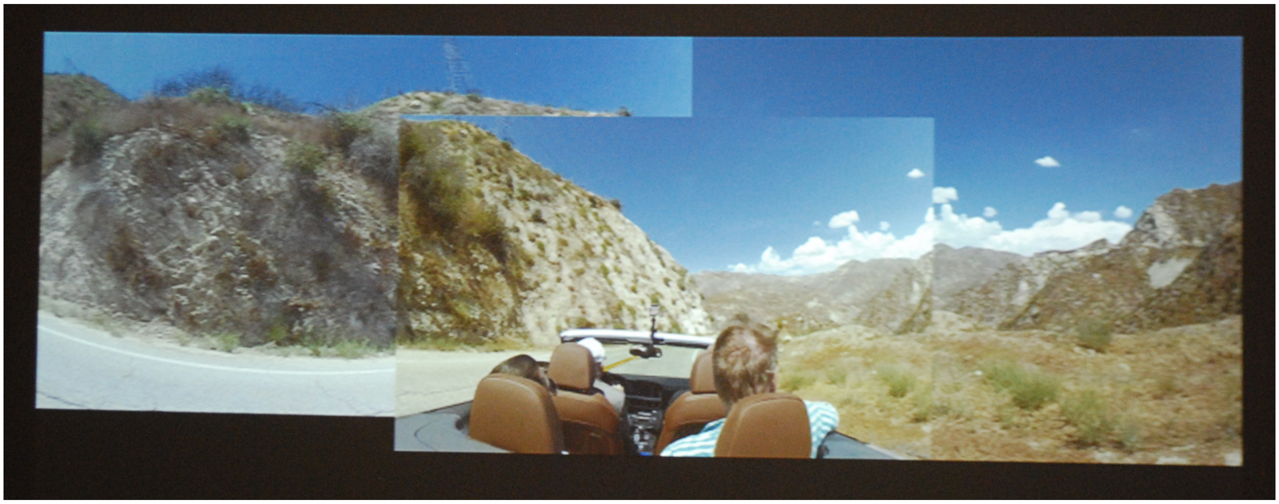
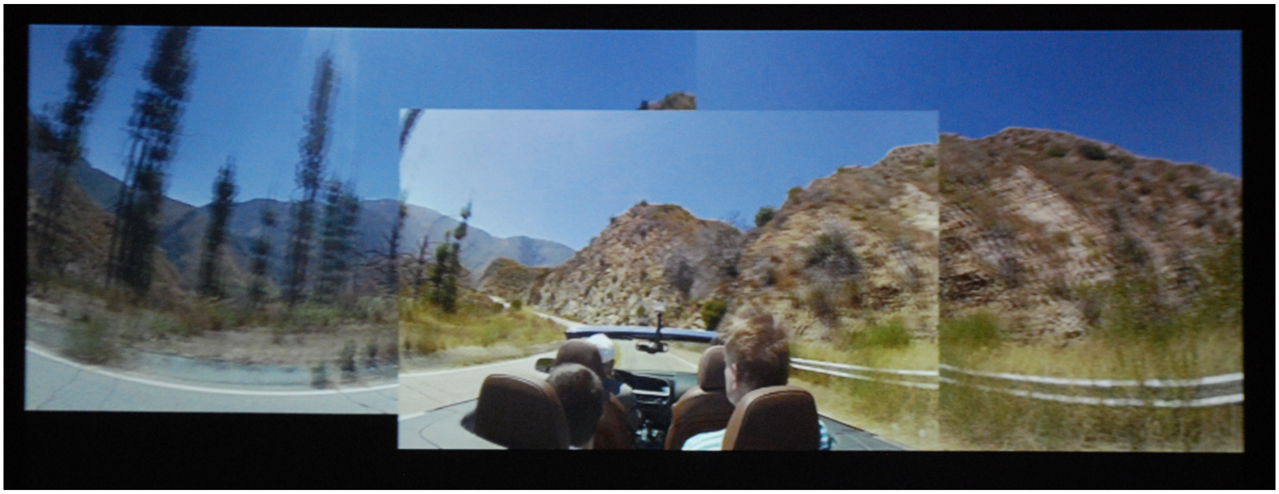


Figure 22. David Hockney. "The Wagner Drive" 2012
Digital Video, Duration 43:46 © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Arthur Kolat





In-Text Illustration Credits

Illustration 1. David Hockney. “Malibu House” 1988
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Sotheby’s

Illustration 2. David Hockney. “Livingroom at Malibu With View” 1988
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36” © David Hockney

Illustration 3. David Hockney. “Breakfast at Malibu, Sunday 1989”
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36” © David Hockney

Illustration 4. David Hockney. “Breakfast at Malibu, Wednesday 1989”
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36” © David Hockney

Illustration 5. David Hockney. “Untitled Seascape” 1989
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36” © David Hockney

Illustration 6. Piano Vocal Score of Richard Wagner’s “Parsifal”

Illustration 7. David Hockney. “Small Santa Monica and the Bay from the Mountains”
1990, Oil on canvas, 26 x 72” © David Hockney

Illustration 8. Piano Vocal Score of Richard Wagner’s “Parsifal”

Illustration 9. David Hockney. “The Cutting” 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48” © David Hockney

Illustration 10. David Hockney. 1 – ½” scale model, Act II, from “Tristan und Isolde”
© David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

Illustration 11. David Hockney. 1 – ½” scale model, Act II, from “Tristan und Isolde”
© David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

Illustration 12. Arthur Kolat looking at Wang Hui’s landscape handscroll
Photo Credit: Arthur Kolat

Illustration 13. David Hockney. “Mountain from Stunt Road” 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48” © David Hockney
Collection Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City

Illustration 14. David Hockney. “The Valley” 1990
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48” © David Hockney
Photo Credit: Steve Oliver

Bibliography

Abbate, Carolyn, and Roger Parker. *A History of Opera.* Updated Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Auslander, Philip. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 1-10.

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955.* Edited by J. O. Urmson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.* New York: Harper & Row, 1971

———. *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angels.* Directed by Julian Cooper. BBC Films, 1972. Vimeo, 52 minutes.

Bernstein, Leonard, and Stephen Sondheim. *West Side Story.* Conducted by Leonard Bernstein. With Kiri Te Kanawa, José Carreras, Tatiana Troyanos, et al. Recorded 1984-1985. Deutsche Grammophon, 2 compact discs.

Bijsterveld, Karin, and Eefje Cleophas, Stephan Krebs, and Gijs Mom. *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening Behind the Wheel.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Collins, Lauren. "The Question Artist: Tino Sehgal's Provocative Encounters." *New Yorker,* August 6, 2012.

Daverio, John, and Eric Sams. "Schumann, Robert." *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press, accessed April 6, 2016. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40704pg18.

de Duve, Thierry. *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Elkins, James. "Against the Sublime." In *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science.* Edited by Roald Hoffman and Iain Boyd Whyte. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. *Six Stories from the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980-2000.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Friedman, Martin. *Hockney Paints the Stage*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1983.

Gabriel, Trip. "At Home With/David Hockney; Acquainted with the Light." *New York Times*, January 21, 1993.

Grey, Thomas. *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Hockney, David. *A Bigger Picture*. London: Royal Academy Publications, 2012.

———. *David Hockney by David Hockney.* Edited by Nikos Stangos. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.

———. *The Rakes Progress* by Igor Stravinsky. Glyndebourne Festival Opera Production conducted by Bernard Haitink. Performed 1975. Arthaus Musik, 1977. DVD, 146 minutes.

———. *That's the way I see it.* Edited by Nikos Stangos. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993

———. *Things Recent.* New York: Andre Emmerich Gallery, 1990.

———. *The Wagner Drive*. 2012. Duration: 43:46. Blu-ray Disc.

Hockney, David, and Lawrence Weschler. *Cameraworks*. New York: Knopf, 1984.

Hockney, David, and Philip Haas. *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China or: Surface is Illusion but so is Depth.* Milestone Films, 1988. Videocassette (VHS), 46 minutes.

Honour, Hugh. *Romanticism.* New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

Isherwood, Christopher. *Liberation: Diaries, Volume Three: 1970-1983*. Edited by Katherine Bucknell. New York: Harper Collins, 2012.

Jones, Amelia. "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *The Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11-18.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment.* Translated by J. H. Bernard. New York: Hafner Press, 1951.

Kim-Cohen, Seth. *Against Ambience.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. PDF e-book.

———. *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art.* New York: Continuum, 2009.

Koss, Juliet. *Modernism After Wagner.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. “The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 3 (June 1941): 257-278.

Proust, Marcel. “Motoring Days (Impressions de route en automobile; 1907).” Translated by Jeffrey T. Schnapp. In *Speed Limits.* Edited by Jeffery T. Schnapp. Milan: Skira editore S.p.A., 2009.

———. *Swann’s Way*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Random House, 1928. Reprinted 1956.

Robinson, Julia. “From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht’s Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s.” *October* 172 (Winter 2009): 77-108.

Rowley, George. *Principles of Chinese Painting.* Second Edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Schwarzer, Mitchell. *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.

Shaw, George Bernard. *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung’s Ring.* New York: Dover, 1967. Republication of the fourth edition. London: Constable & Co., 1923.

Smith, Tony, and Samuel Wagstaff, Jr. “Talking with Tony Smith.” Artforum (December 1966): 14-19.

Taruskin, Richard. *Music in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010

Wagner, Richard. *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works.* Translated by William Ashton Ellis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993. Reprinted from Volume 1 of *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895.

———. *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Orchester der Bayreuther Festspiele. Conducted by Daniel Barenboim. With John Tomlinson, Anne Evans, Siegfried Jerusalem, et al. Recorded June/July 1991 and June/July 1992. Warner Classics, 14 compact discs. Librettos translated by William Mann. Translations originally published by The Friends of Covent Garden.

———. *Parsifal*. Berliner Philharmoniker und Chor der Deutschen Oper Berlin. Conducted by Herbert von Karajan. With José van Dam, Kurt Moll, Peter Hofmann, et al. Recorded December 1979 and January/April/July 1980. Deutsche Grammophon, 4 compact discs. Libretto Translation by Lionel Slater.

Weschler, Lawrence. *True to Life: Twenty-five Years of Conversatios with David Hockney.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.